

FAMILY SUPPORT PROGRAM FOR IMMIGRANT PARENTS

PURSUING THE AMERICAN DREAM

A THESIS-PROJECT

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF

GORDON-CONWELL THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

FOR THE DEGREE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

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MAY 2024

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To the immigrants—men and women—
who come to the United States pursuing the American Dream

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ABBREVIATIONS

AD	American Dream
EEC	Early Education and Childcare
ESL	English as a Second Language
GSAGF	Good Shepherd Assembly of God in Framingham
IFSP	Immigrant Family Support Program
MA	Massachusetts
PA	Parental Assistance
PCR	Public Charge Rule
QBC	Questionnaire for the Brazilian Community
QPBC	Questionnaire for Pastors of Brazilian Congregations
US	United States

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ACNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to thank God for being my everything, and my strength. Also, my sister Sirlene Evangelista who always believes in me, and my friend Anthony Sharp for his contributions to improve the clarity of my thoughts.

I want to thank my brother-in Christ, Varnel Antoine. He has been by my side every step of the way since the very beginning through the very end of this marathon called Doctor of Ministry. When I felt so overwhelmed and lost that I wanted to quit the program, my “Black Angel,” as I call him, encouraged me to keep going and not give up. If I am now presenting this thesis-project and nearing the finish line it is because of his presence, his support, and his embrace. “When Moses’ hands grew tired, they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur held his hands up—one on one side, one on the other—so that his hands remained steady till sunset.” (Exodus 17:12 NVI). I could not be more proud and grateful of walking on Commencement along my dear brother Varnel, who held my hands up so they would remain steady till the end of this thesis-project.

My gratitude to my editor, Glorimar Camareno, who also helped keep my hands up and ran along with me the last leg of this marathon race.

I want to thank my mentor, Dr. Virginia Ward, and my reader, Dr. Peter James, for their support and feedback during the process of putting together this thesis-project.

I also want to thank my family for their love, support, and presence in my life during this process of my doctoral studies.

ABSTRACT

Immigrants have come to the United States in pursuit of the American Dream that focuses on gaining material prosperity through hard work. A problem immigrant families face is obtaining day care for their children, allowing the parents to work. Parents face the challenging task of negotiating a complex health care system and schooling. The purpose of this qualitative action research is to develop the Immigrant Family Support Program that includes daycare, preschool, after-school care, and assistance with accessing health care and schooling. The focus of this program would be on reconnecting immigrant families with their spirituality and faith in Christ.

CHAPTER 1

THE PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING

Introduction

In the content of Brazilians, the American Dream (AD) transpires as coming to the United States (US) with the purpose of giving their family a better a life, buying a big and beautiful house, and have enough savings to support the people left behind in Brazil. Pretty much every household in Brazil has a relative who has moved to the US and talks about how wonderful it is that you can buy a house, and you can do this, and you can do that. People get excited about the idea and want to do the same and move to what is viewed as “the promised land” to have a better life. Sorrowfully, Brazilian immigrants are faced with the reality of a foreign language that can be very difficult to learn, a completely different the culture, unfamiliar customs, and drastic changes in climate during the seasons, all while they mourn being separated from their family, friends, and familiar surroundings. The acclimation process takes quite some time and can be an emotional rollercoaster for Brazilians immigrants.

The climate in Brazil is mostly tropical, whereas the four seasons in the area of New England are very different. Summer runs in Brazil from December to March, while Winter runs from June to September; the complete opposite to the US. If a family arrives in the US from Brazil in February, they could be greeted by bitter cold temperatures and mountains of snow. They may not even realize how much they would need to spend on appropriate Winter clothing. Brazilian immigrants need to concede themselves one year of living in the US, going through all four seasons, before they can consider themselves accustomed to living in the country.

The Problem

One burdensome and unexpected problem that immigrants face upon arriving in the US is dealing with all the unknown surprises that they find and were unprepared for. There is a tendency of many of the Brazilian immigrants in our congregation and our community to focus on pursuing the material benefits associated with the AD. In the process, they could lose the guidance provided by their faith in Christ. This faith is important for supporting the transition into a new culture, and particularly important for children and adolescents as they form ties with a new community. While for the parents might be a little easier to hold on to their faith as they navigate through all new experiences and surroundings, there is a concern about the children who would be growing up in a completely different setting that might try to steer them away from faith. Their faith in Christ is also important for negotiating the conflicts created by the different cultural norms and social expectations found in the US.

Newly arriving immigrant parents are forced to work long hours, often for small wages, creating a childcare crisis for the family. In this situation, the children become innocent victims who long for closer relationships with the parents who are forced to work rather than spend time nurturing their loved ones and helping them in their transition to a new country. This only exacerbates the stress of the acculturation process for the entire family. The stress can often lead to marital problems between the parents, continuing a vicious cycle that can be addressed by faith and a strong congregation support. Unfortunately, many immigrants are at risk of leaving faith behind in search of the highly anticipated AD.

Background

Many documented and undocumented individuals have come to the US in pursuit of this AD. The immigrants have the expectation of finding a better life in the new land. They often face harsh conditions during the migration journey, and some have even risked death by travelling on foot through deserts. They were motivated to migrate by the belief in the AD and its promise of improved economic and social conditions. In addition to seeking prosperity, immigrants come to the US to find security or to escape from political oppression.¹

The AD promoting immigration from all parts of the world has become part of the mystique surrounding the US. Both, individuals who left their home countries and individuals who remained behind but wish they had migrated, communicate the belief that the US is an exceptional nation with opportunities for everyone.² For immigrants, the AD is an ethos that envisions the US as a society in which everyone can achieve success. Regardless of class, hard work can bring a material quality of life better than that of their parents.³ The concept of the AD also implies that the pursuit of material goods will bring happiness.⁴

Despite the promise of wealth from living in the US, most immigrants have found achieving the AD is elusive. Many of the immigrants did not consider the full range of difficulties

¹ Nikolay Katsarski, "Factors Determining Migration of the Population." *Knowledge International Journal*, 30, No. 6 (2019), p. 1,730.

² Alfredo Carballo, "The American Dream in Transnational Migratory Circuit." *European Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies*, No. 108 (2019), p. 23.

³ Jennifer Wolack and David Peterson, "The Dynamic American Dream." *American Journal of Political Science*, 64, No. 4 (2020), p. 968.

⁴ Mark Cleveland and William Chang, "Migration and Materialism: The Role of Ethnic Identity, Religiosity, and Generation." *Journal of Business Research*, 62, No. 10 (2009), p. 954.

with settling in a new nation. Immigrants to the US must adapt to the new society by learning a different language and embracing new customs in a process referred to as acculturation. Immigrants often adopt American concepts about individual independence that replace reliance on God and family with the pursuit of materialism.⁵

Brazilian immigrants face challenges that not only unique but also unexpected for them as they are completely unprepared for them. While undocumented, they live in the shadow, unable to work or drive. They ought to find jobs near other Brazilian people. The language barrier is another enormous challenge. Not speaking English but Portuguese, they need to have a translator even at work. There are not many jobs available that require Portuguese language, so the Brazilian immigrants end up having to work in construction, landscaping, or house cleaning. Even in those job, the communication proves to be a challenge for instructions could be easily misunderstood due to the lack of understanding of the language on both parts, the transmitter and the receiver.

The acculturation process creates additional stress for immigrants from attempting to adopt the norms, customs, and values of a new culture that may differ from their home country.⁶ Marginalization in American society and separation from family in the home country also create significant stress. Immigrants—and particularly undocumented immigrants—face unexpected hardships in the US such as barriers to obtaining employment or public health care

⁵ Richard Cervantes, et al., “Optimism and the American Dream: Latino Perspectives on Opportunities and Challenges toward Reaching Family Goals.” *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences*, 43, No. 3 (2021), p. 149.

⁶ Venera Bekteshi and Sun-Wang Kang, “Contextualizing Acculturative Stress among Latino Immigrants to the United States: A Systematic Review.” *Ethnicity and Health*, 26, No. 6 (2020), p.899.

services like Medicaid.⁷ Frustration with achieving the AD can lead to discontent and mental health issues that include depression and substance abuse.⁸

The problems faced by immigrants are particularly complex when the family has children because parents become focused on working to obtain the material goods necessary for the family. The children are often left in the care of strangers or distant relatives while the parents work. Moreover, the adversity experienced by immigrant parents can have a negative effect on the physical and spiritual development of children.⁹

The need to care properly for children while working can also be a source of stress for immigrant parents. Parents with smaller children must balance work with family responsibilities. Parents of older children must interface with schools and health care systems, which can be difficult because of language and cultural barriers. Working parents of older children must also find facilities suitable to provide after-school or weekend care for their children. An added issue with parenting is the differences in the rate of acculturation between parent and child. Children often adopt American attitudes and practices faster than parents. The priority immigrant parents may place on pursuing material wealth can negatively influence the spiritual development of children if the children also focus on material possessions. As children associate with wealthier peers, they may become resentful towards parents that are unable to meet

⁷ John Iceland, "Hardships Among Immigrants and the Native Born in the United States." *Demography*, 58, No. 2 (2021), p. 658.

⁸ B. Choy, et al., "Systematic Review: Acculturation Strategies and Their Impact on Mental Health of Migrants." *Public Health in Practice*, 2 (2021), p. 3.

⁹ Reuben Parra-Cardona, et al., "Faith-Based Organizations as Leaders of Implementation." *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, 19, No. 3 (2021), p.22.

materialistic expectations.¹⁰ Immigrant parents often feel that they are failing their children because of difficulties with child rearing and understanding the changes children experience from living in a new nation.¹¹

The American Dream and Christian Immigrants

The emphasis on materialism in American society can draw immigrants away from God based on the erroneous belief that the acquisition of goods can be a source of happiness.¹² Materialism fosters an external orientation on possessions rather than seeking non-material or spiritual sources of life satisfaction.¹³ Christian immigrants can experience stress from the conflict between the basic principles of Christian belief and the norms of secular society promoting materialism.¹⁴ Christian beliefs reject the fascination with material goods as a practice associated with the sin of greed incompatible with Christian values.¹⁵ The tension between cultural materialism and Christian values can create confusion for immigrants. Compounding the confusion for immigrants is the effort in American society to justify

¹⁰ Abigail Weaver, "American Corporate Capitalism's Effect on Adolescent Psychology." *Journal of Student Research*, 9, No. 2 (2020), p. 7.

¹¹ Joanna Baruszak-Kiziukiewicz and Grazyna Kmita, "Parenting Self-Efficacy in Immigrant Families: A Systematic Review." *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11, No. 985 (2020), p. 9.

¹² Valeriu Frunzaru and Elena Frunzaru, "Materialism and Life Satisfaction: A Sociological and Christian Comparative Approach." *Journal for the Study of Religion and Ideology*, 16, No. 48 (2017), p. 33.

¹³ Frunzaru and Frunzaru, "Materialism," p. 33.

¹⁴ Sarah Konig, "Almighty God and the Almighty Dollar: The Study of Religion and the Market Economies in the United States." *Religion Compass*, 10, No. 4 (2016), p. 86.

¹⁵ Andrzej Zwolinski, "The Christian Understanding of Happiness." *The Person and Challenges*, 6, No 1. (2016), p. 91.

materialism with concepts such as the Protestant work ethic.¹⁶ However, the pursuit of materialism interferes with the happiness for Christians. They cannot obtain the eternal peace that comes from ultimately being in the presence of God and the pleasure encountered through the life journey that brings people closer to God.¹⁷

Christianity has a tradition of providing care and support for migrants, whether legal or illegal.¹⁸ Scripture has numerous examples of immigration such as the fair treatment of strangers demonstrated by Abraham's hospitality for three strangers¹⁹ or Ruth's decision to immigrate to Judah with Naomi to remain with family.²⁰ By following the tradition of hospitality to strangers, Christian ministry has the opportunity to provide the support necessary for immigrants to focus on following the Word of God. Rejecting materialism and developing Christian contentment through Christ is the optimal approach to achieve the happiness the immigrants sought when coming to the US.

Religious faith moderates acculturative stress by helping individuals understand negative situations and reframe stressful events based on their religious beliefs.²¹ Faith in Christ is

¹⁶ Konig, "Almighty," p. 85.

¹⁷ Katharine Schori, "The Pursuit of Happiness in the Christian Tradition: Goal and Journey." *Journal of Law and Religion*, 29, No. 1 (2014), p. 57.

¹⁸ Alex Sackey-Ansah, "Ethical Theories and Approaches to Immigration int the United States: Focus on Undocumented Immigrants." *Transformation: An International Journal of Holistic Mission Studies*, 38, No. 2 (2021), p. 142.

¹⁹ Gen 18. All Bible passages are taken from New International Version, unless otherwise noted.

²⁰ Ruth 1:15-17.

²¹ Heyde Luz, "Acculturative Stress, Loneliness, and Depressive Symptoms in International Students: A Moderation Analysis of Religious Faith and Sense of Meaning." (PhD Dissertation, Liberty University, 2020), p. 12.

important for negotiating the conflicts and tension created by the different cultural norms and social expectations found in the US.²² The importance of religious beliefs in the coping process varies among individuals and among different cultural groups of immigrants. Individuals with strong religious beliefs in their homeland are likely to depend on their beliefs after migrating to the US. Other individuals may be spiritually lost and overwhelmed by the need to adjust to a new way of life.

The concept of contentment through Christ can provide a strong foundation for achieving happiness among immigrants acculturating in the US. Contentment through Christ underscores the importance of developing an internal focus on God to bring happiness. Contentment involves developing a state of internal satisfaction that remains constant regardless of changes to an individual's external situation. Contentment through Christ is a psychological and spiritual state of satisfaction developing from God's grace and from surrendering to God's will. Through Christian contentment an individual finds pleasure in life events from the knowledge that the events occurred as a result of God's wisdom and goodness.²³ In the Bible, Paul discussed the concept of contentment through Christ when he told the Corinthians about a thorn in his flesh that he could endure when God told him, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."²⁴ Paul further noted that

²² M. Gayle Gabriel, "Christian Faith in the Immigration and Acculturation Experiences of Filipino American Youth." *Journal of Youth Development*, 14, No. 2 (2019), pp. 120-122.

²³ Joshua Knabb, Veola Vázquez, and Kenneth Wang, "The Christian Contentment Scale: An Emic Measure for Assessing Inner Satisfaction within the Christian Tradition." *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, 49, No. 2 (2021), p. 330.

²⁴ 2 Cor 12:9.

through God's grace he "learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength."²⁵ By cultivating Christian contentment with prayer and Bible study all Christians can learn to be satisfied in their situation.

Ministering to the immigrant population creates an opportunity to provide practical and spiritual guidance to assist in coping with life in the US. Developing faith in Christ, a sense of connection to God, and fellowship with a Christian community helps to relieve stress.²⁶ An approach to assist the immigrant population is to provide free daycare, preschool, and after-school services for children in immigrant families coordinated by a church is an important part of ministering to this population. Childcare services through the church also helps foster a religious identity among immigrant children. The church can encourage them to understand they are part of a religious community.²⁷ Ministering to the immigrant population also involves support to help families negotiate the complexity of life in the US in areas such as health care or education. The most significant way to help immigrants is through counseling to help develop contentment through Christ.

²⁵ Phil 4:12-13.

²⁶ Dioi Cruz, "A Biblical Approach for an Inner Healing Discipleship for Migrants and Refugees." *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies*, 14, No. 1 (2019), p. 97.

²⁷ Karen Phalet, et al., "Religious Identity and Acculturation of Immigrant Minority Youth: Toward a Contextual and Developmental Approach." *European Psychologist*, 23, Vol. 1 (2018), p. 35.

Hypothesis

After careful examination of the problem presented, the background and the situations that most Brazilian immigrant families encounter upon arriving in the US in search of the very longed for AD, the author of this thesis-project has come to formulate the hypothesis for this action research thesis-project. He wants to examine the hypothesis that, by developing and implementing a program that supports immigrant families, and single persons as well, in which parents get help in the much-needed areas of childcare, identifying and applying for health care services and educational aids combined with a strong emphasis for all people on finding contentment in Christ as they navigate the new and unexpected challenges of life in a new country, immigrants would have a better quality of life and help to raise their children holding on to the faith that they brought from their homeland. The formulation of this hypothesis leads us to the action question: How can a church develop a family support plan to assist immigrant families and singles with developing content through Christ?

The Setting

The setting for the study is the Good Shepherd Assembly of God Church in Framingham (GSAGF), Massachusetts (MA), situated in a suburban area. This is a congregation composed primarily of Brazilian immigrants struggling to adapt to life in the US. The community in which the church is situated has a population of 71,230 individuals. This is a relatively affluent community with a median household income of \$90,000. Approximately 10.5% of the residents in the town of Framingham have income below the poverty level, which is lower than the average in the US. Among the residents of the community, 31% are foreign born. Brazilians

represent a subgroup of immigrants in the US with a population of approximately 500,000, including 100,000 arriving without documentation.²⁸ Just about 6,000 Brazilians live in the community, which is the largest Brazilian communities in the US. Many of the Brazilians in the community live close to or below the poverty level.

Most of the Brazilian immigrants initially do not understand American culture, the English language, and the customs related to life in the US. Consequently, adjusting to the new way of life is often difficult for many Brazilians. The Brazilian immigrants also tend to cluster in neighborhoods to provide mutual support for each other in the new land. The Brazilian immigrants generally find employment only in low-paying service or construction jobs, some of which involves working in hazardous conditions. Furthermore, many immigrants do not have job security and can face long periods of unemployment.²⁹ Brazilian children, and particularly adolescents, often face a conflict between maintaining their ethnic culture and language and the pressures from schools and peer groups to assimilate.³⁰

The role of the author of this thesis-project as pastor of such congregation, as well as his Brazilian heritage, places him in a unique position to understand the problems faced by Brazilian immigrants and their children that have settled in the US. The reality they encounter is often far more difficult than they expected. Pastoral counseling of Brazilian immigrants that have become

²⁸ Cristina Brinkerhoff, et al., "There You Enjoy Life, Here You Work: Brazilian and Dominican Immigrants Views on Life and Health in the United States." *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 16, No. 20 (2019), p. 3.

²⁹ Brinkerhoff, "There You," p. 3.

³⁰ Clarisse Halperin, et al., "I'm Brazilian not Brazilian-American: The Experiences of Second-Generation Brazilian Adolescents Preserving their Heritage Language and Resisting Assimilation." *International Journal of Multicultural Education*, 24, No. 1 (2022), p. 145.

disillusioned with their current life in the US involves focusing on strengthening their faith in Christ to achieve greater contentment with their lives. Counseling also involves helping the family find solutions to help children adjust to the new environment. As pastors to Brazilian immigrant, our leadership challenge is to develop an approach to help immigrants recognize that the AD is incompatible with the Word of God. The immigrants should recognize that the concept of contentment through Christ that comes from following the Word of God should replace the AD.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this action research study is to develop a church-based family support program for immigrants. The program will provide childcare for working parents, support for assistance in obtaining government health care services for children and interacting with schools, and spiritual counseling for parents and single immigrants. Action research is an interactive research process in which a leader interacts with others to effect positive individual, spiritual, and social change.³¹ The use of an action research approach is appropriate for this study because the objective is to foster positive change in others. In this study, the childcare and family support services will contribute to the positive change of abandoning the AD in favor of contentment in Christ. The action research question examined in this study is: How can a church develop a family support program to assist immigrant families and singles with developing contentment through Christ?

³¹ Paul Bramer and Mark Chapman, "Action Research for the Doctor of Ministry Project: A Practical Definition." *Journal of Christian Ministry*, 6 (2017), p. 29.

The steps associated with action research are:

- Planning
- Acting
- Observing
- Reflecting as a cycle to develop an approach to foster beneficial changes in others.

In this study, the planning phase collects data to identify the problem, which involves childcare for immigrant families. The acting phase of the study is the development of the practical elements of the children's daycare and preschool services that involves the activities associated with providing services such as budgeting, recruitment, and defining procedures. The observation phase involves implementing the children's services and collecting data about the effects of the services. The reflection phase focuses on using the data collected during observation to make changes in the presentation that increase the effectiveness of the seminar. The current study will only use the planning and acting phases of the action research process.

The Immigrant Family Support Program

The Immigrant Family Support Program (IFSP) is intended to provide the much-needed help to immigrant families who need childcare assistance as well as assist immigrants with questioning the validity of the concept of the AD. Furthermore, it will explain to parents and single adults the concept of Christian contentment as manifested in the Word of God as a viable substitute for the AD. All immigrant families with children that are part of the congregation will be invited to participate in the program, which will operate as a sanctuary for undocumented

immigrants. Single immigrant members of the congregation will be invited to participate in the counseling and Bible study components of the program.

For children under the age of five, the childcare component of the IFSP will have a free daycare, preschool, and after-school care for children of immigrant parents free of charge coordinated by the church. The preschool will assist children with preparing for school and ensure the children learn biblical principles. For children over the age of five, the church will help families with completing registration for school. It will also include an after-school program to ensure parents can continue working when school is not in session. The after-school program will provide children with a safe environment until their parents finish the workday.

The IFSP will assist families in applying for MassHealth, which offers government-funded health care for low-income children and their families in the state of MA, where the church is located. The program will also assist single immigrants with obtaining health care through government sources. An additional service of the IFSP is counseling for parents intended to assist them with adjusting to life in the US. The counseling will also stress developing contentment in Christ. The IFSP also includes a Bible school for children and their families with Bible teaching as part of the after-school program for the children. The members of the families in the program and single adults participating in the program will also be expected to attend a prayer meeting once a week, which will be held in conjunction with the family Bible school meetings.

The counseling component of the IFSP is particularly important for helping the entire family and single immigrants to recognize the incongruity of the concept of the AD with biblical teachings and the Christian way of life. The quest for a better life through material acquisition

that drove many people to come to the US is a barrier to achieving happiness. The materialism aspect of the AD leads people to focus on their external situation. The counseling will help parents question the validity of the AD and the harm caused by striving for wealth. The goal is to help the program participants understand that focusing on the welfare of the children and the family rather than pursuing wealth is consistent with the Word of God and will bring them happiness.

Throughout the program, and particularly in the counseling sessions, participants will be encouraged to work towards achieving contentment through Christ with prayer, Bible study and devotional worship. The spiritual counseling will emphasize the importance of the value to the entire family and single adults from routinely engaging in devotional activities, which is critical for following the Word of God and for developing family unity. Ideally, the families and single participants will recognize the church as a place meeting their spiritual and individual needs, helping them find contentment through Christ.

Significance of the Study

The IFSP developed as part of the study may have significance for Brazilian immigrants in the congregation and in the community by providing daycare and preschool for young children and assistance in registering children for health care and schools. The support provided to families with children will encourage parents to focus on Christian contentment through Christ that is important for leading a God-centered life. The result from developing this support program could also provide a framework for other pastors to use with immigrant families and single adults with modifications suited for the specific needs of their congregations. The results

of the study may also provide insight about approaches to combine practical assistance such as daycare as a pathway for encouraging the members of the church to develop Christian contentment through Christ.

Delimitations of the Study

The study is delimited to an investigation related to the development of a child daycare, preschool, and after school activities, health care and school registration support for children, and counseling to assist parents and single adults with understanding the benefits of Christian contentment through faith in Christ among a population of Brazilian immigrants. The study is further delimited to the Brazilian population in a specific suburban community. The study is not considering factors other than childcare needs that can affect the lives of the Brazilian population.

Conclusion

After establishing the problems and needs of the Brazilian immigrants in GSAGF and presenting an overview of the action research thesis-project envisioned by the researcher to respond to such needs, the next few chapters are aimed at further exploring the topic of contentment and the needs of the immigrant community. Chapter 2 presents the theological groundwork on the topic of contentment and immigration. Chapter 3 renders an extensive review of literature on the topics considered for this study. The details of the IFSP as it was conceived and delineated are presented on Chapter 4. The last chapter of this thesis-project, Chapter 5, presents the outcomes and learnings of the first two phases of the action research

carried out by the author of this thesis-project. All the data collected through the different steps of this thesis-project is presented in the Appendix section at the end of the project.

CHAPTER 2

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

The Holy Scriptures—consisting of the Old and New Testaments—contain the divine Word of God committed to humanity through the writings of the authors who were inspired by the Holy Spirit. Consequently, the Bible provides the authority for the theological foundation with respect to the duties of immigrants living in a foreign nation and the importance of contentment through Christ for salvation. Relying on the Bible to provide guidance about matters such as immigration and contentment is consistent with church doctrine of *sola scriptura*, a necessary truth for salvation in spiritual lives that uses the Scriptures to bring forth your thoughts.

Migration in the Bible

The Bible reveals that migration has been an important aspect of human existence since the beginning of history when Adam and Eve left the Garden of Eden,¹ which can be viewed as the first migration. Prominent figures in the Bible such as Abraham, David, and the infant Jesus lived for a time in foreign lands and were dependent on the goodwill of the people in those lands for safety and survival. The need for immigrants to keep their faith as they dwell among strangers is also a theme found in the Bible.² The apostle Peter directly counsels Christians living

¹ Gen 3:23.

² Acts 8:4; 1 Peter 1:2.

as foreigners or exiles in a foreign land to abstain from sinful desires and to live good lives among the pagans to avoid accusations of wrongdoing.³

The Bible's account of Abraham, who went to a strange land to receive his inheritance, reveals the responsibility of an immigrant to cling to faith in God as a spiritual support.

"By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God."⁴

Although Abraham was in a new environment, he understood that his faith in God was a constant in his life. He focused on the assurances that God had given him rather than the circumstances of his immediate situation as an immigrant.

The Bible also reveals that faith in Christ creates a universal citizenship that transcends the status of an individual as an immigrant. Paul remarks: "our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ."⁵ From this perspective, Christians have a physical relationship with the world that may differ based on the land in which they live. At the same time, Christians have a spiritual relationship with Christ that is constant creating the hope of dwelling in the Kingdom of heaven. Christian immigrants have a responsibility to live for the future and to maintain faith in Christ and a Christian mindset regardless of their external situation.⁶

³ 1 Peter 2:11-12.

⁴ Heb 11:9-10.

⁵ Phil 3:20.

⁶ Warren Wiersbe, *Bible Exposition Commentary: New Testament*, Vol. 2. (Colorado Springs, CO: Victor, 2001), p. 91.

Following Christ when facing the challenges of living in a foreign land involves embracing Christian contentment. Contentment can be understood as a condition in life in which no additional aid or support is necessary to sustain the individual.⁷ Christian contentment occurs when faith in Christ alone is sufficient to sustain and support the individual in the various and often adverse circumstances encountered in life. The experiences of Paul when he was a migrant in foreign lands is an example of the importance of maintaining Christian contentment. Paul was in prison in Rome when he wrote the letter. He noted that he had faced hardships as a migrant but had found spiritual contentment through his faith in Christ.⁸

Achieving contentment through Christ comes from focusing on the fact that God offers people eternal salvation and will provide for all human needs. However, the pursuit of the material things of the world distracts the individual from the real purpose of life of gaining salvation through focusing on Christ and obeying the Law of God.⁹ To achieve contentment through Christ, Christians must detach themselves from the things of the world and concentrate on spiritual matters that allow them to draw closer to Christ.

The experience of the author of this thesis-project as an immigrant demonstrates the importance of maintaining a relationship with Christ in a new country. When the author of this thesis-project first came to the US, he was overwhelmed by the cultural differences and, particularly, by the focus of the people on acquiring material goods. He was relatively poor by American standards. Other members of the Brazilian community in which he lived stressed the

⁷ Edward Root, "Contentment and Fellowship: or Paul's Teaching Regarding Property." *The Old and New Testament Student*, 11, No. 5 (1890), p. 288.

⁸ Phil 4:11-19.

⁹ Matt 6:19-2.

urgency of finding employment to eventually become wealthy. His relationship with Christ enabled him to understand the spiritual harm of pursuing wealth. Some of his fellow immigrants had lost their faith, devoting themselves to greed and other sinful behavior that hurt them physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Through prayer and reference to Scripture, he was able to remain content with what we had. He also resolved to help others in the community to find the same contentment through Christ that would support them spiritually as they navigate through the cultural norms in the US that clash with Christian beliefs.

Contentment Through Christ

Contentment through Christ that leads to happiness in this life and the next is a recurrent theme in the Bible.¹⁰ Contentment occurs when people are satisfied with what they have and do not seek more beyond what is necessary to meet their needs. In contrast, discontent develops when people are dissatisfied with what they have and strive to obtain more than they need.

The striving for more material goods causes physical or spiritual harm because the pursuit of the things of this world distracts individuals from their true purpose in life, which is of the worship of God. Ellen White describes the benefits of contentment through Christ and the injury resulting from discontent.

I have seen that those who live for a purpose, seeking to benefit and bless their fellow men and to honor and glorify their Redeemer, are the truly happy ones on the earth, while the man who is restless, discontented, and seeking this and testing that, hoping to

¹⁰ Phil 4:11-13; 1 Tim 6:6-12:2; Cor 12:9; Rom 8:29.

find happiness, is always complaining of disappointment. He is always in want, never satisfied, because he lives for himself alone.¹¹

An example of the consequences discontent with what God has given to humans occurs in the beginning of the Bible in the decision of Adam and Eve to have more despite the abundance around them provided by God. They were both created in God's image, which implies that they were good and ideal humans.¹² Ellen White notes that, "Adam was perfect in form—strong, comely, pure, bearing the image of his Maker."¹³ Adam and Eve had everything they could need in Eden but were still not satisfied. They became discontent with what they had and desired the one thing they could not have, which was to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil that God had forbidden.¹⁴ Satan, in his struggle to draw people away from God, used the instrument of the serpent to foster Eve's discontent by tempting her to engage in the act forbidden by God's law. Eve then encouraged Adam to sin, with Adam listening to Eve rather than focusing on obeying God's law.

The passage demonstrates how Satan capitalizes on discontent through the "use of the members of the human family, striving by means of every species of cunning and deception to hedge up the path of righteousness."¹⁵ Because of their lack of contentment in the abundance that God had given them, Adam and Eve sinned and lost everything. Their transgression

¹¹ Ellen G. White, *Our High Calling*. (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing, 1961), p. 64.

¹² Gen 1:26; Matt 5:48.

¹³ Ellen G. White, *SDA Bible Commentary*, ed. F. Nichol (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing, 1953), p. 1:7.

¹⁴ Gen 2:17.

¹⁵ White, *SDA*, p. 1:9.

resulted in humans living in an imperfect world that encourages the tendency to sin that is the result of the sin of Adam and Eve.

In contrast to the discontent of Adam and Eve, contentment through Christ is the appreciation of all that God has given us, including a route to eternal salvation through faith in Christ and obedience to God's law.¹⁶ Christians achieve contentment by accepting that their steadfast faith in God and His providence are sufficient for quieting their concerns when they are faced with difficult situations or circumstances. Ellen White emphasizes the importance of obedience to God's law as a condition of achieving the happiness of eternal life.¹⁷ As a result, Christians develop a spirit of contentment to follow Paul's exhortation of "Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing, and perfect will."¹⁸ Focusing on God rather than the things of the world is central for attaining contentment through Christ.

Embracing Christian contentment is particularly important for immigrants in the US who face a clash between the values brought from their homeland and the materialistic values of their adopted country. In an environment characterized by an abundance of material goods that symbolizes the economic benefits of life in the US, it is sometimes difficult to maintain a spiritual focus. The Bible reminds us that there is no long-term gain from pursuing the material things in life.¹⁹

¹⁶ Andrzej Zwolinski, "The Christian Understanding of Happiness." *The Person and Challenges* 6, No 1. (2016), p. 84.

¹⁷ Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*. (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing, 1892), p. 62.

¹⁸ Rom 12:2.

¹⁹ Luke 12:13-21; Matt 6:24.

Paul also describes the benefits of contentment through Christ by stating, “But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that.”²⁰ The contentment Paul describes is rooted in the knowledge that the forgiveness of sin is promised to those who repent of past sins, have faith in Christ, and remain faithful to God’s law.²¹ As a result, the knowledge that sins are forgiven is the great gain that fosters people remaining focused on Christ rather than directing their thoughts toward the material things of the world. Paul’s instruction is particularly helpful for immigrants that may have been very poor in their homeland but now have the opportunity to acquire material goods in the US. Remaining content with the current situation is central for immigrants to maintain a relationship with God.

Paul also indicates that contentment through Christ can sustain people, regardless of their circumstances.²² He is likely to have been referring to the way that contentment through Christ helped him deal with the adversity he experienced during his time of imprisonment. Paul also implies that acceptance of Christ was the basis of his personal contentment.²³ As a Christian, Paul’s continued spiritual rather than material focus allowed him to contend with the various adverse situations occurring in life. Paul’s account is also particularly relevant for

²⁰ 1 Tim 6:6-8.

²¹ White, *SDA*, p. 7:53.

²² Phil 4:11.

²³ 1 Tim 1:15-17.

immigrants encountering adverse circumstances such as difficulties with language or employment in their new country.

Paul further indicates that his faith in God brought him happiness that resulted in godliness and contentment. He considers contentment necessary in this life by providing strength to deal with adversity. Contentment also contributed to the next life by helping him gain a place in God's Kingdom. Nonetheless, Paul does not suggest that all discontent is deleterious to the individual. Ellen White annotates,

That unrest and discontent which ends in fretting and complaining is sinful; but the discontent with one's self which urges on to more earnest effort for greater improvement of the mind for a broader field of usefulness is praiseworthy. This discontent does not end in disappointment but in gathering force for a higher and more extended field of usefulness.²⁴

For immigrants, being content through Christ means living with the purpose of serving God as the foremost consideration in all situations they encounter in their new environment. At the same time, all individuals whether immigrants or native-born, can have legitimate discontent with their efforts to live a godly life, which can lead them to increase their determination to glorify and honor the Redeemer in all their actions. Contentment through Christ does not rely on a naïve pretense about a negative current situation but rather on trust and confidence that the events or situations are part of God's plan. Christians trust that God will provide what they need to cope with the circumstances.²⁵ Contentment through Christ involves relying on God to provide the necessary strength to deal with any type of adversity.

²⁴ White, *Our High*, p. 242.

²⁵ Matt 6:11; 7:11.

The situation of the Israelites as they wandered in the desert after leaving Egypt demonstrates the way God provides for the needs of the people who trust in Him. The people were hungry because they could not find enough food in the desert. However, God told Moses “I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day.”²⁶ God further commanded that the Israelites should take only as much as they could eat in a single day. The Israelites who disobeyed God’s command by taking more than they needed for the day found that the excess bread from heaven rotted overnight.²⁷ God’s commandment was for the people of Israel to be content when they had enough to eat, which shows a link between contentment and God’s providence. Those who were discontent with what God gave them and violated God’s command did not profit from their sin. The passage implies that immigrants who strive to gain material possessions beyond what they actually need will not profit from their unwillingness to be content with what God has provided.

Jeremiah further describes contentment that comes from trust in the Lord as similar to the roots of a tree by a stream that sustains the tree regardless of external conditions such as draught.²⁸ Achieving contentment and trust in God creates spiritual roots that can help people deal with any external circumstances from the knowledge that God will provide the strength they need to remain steadfast in their devotion to Him. People who turn to the world will be disappointed. People who trust in God and are content will find present and eternal happiness, prospering like the tree described by Jeremiah and as Jesus told us those who “stand firm to the

²⁶ Ex 16:4.

²⁷ Ex 16:16; 16:20.

²⁸ Jer 17:7-8.

end will achieve salvation.”²⁹ Standing firm requires to remain unwavering in the knowledge that God will provide for our needs.

Secular Laws and Immigrants

The appearance of a potential conflict among biblical principles can arise when the secular laws of the nation are hostile towards immigrants and seek to expel them from the nation for not following secular law. A Christian is required to adhere to the law made by rulers. Christ told us, “Give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s.”³⁰ At the same time, Christians are required “to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”³¹ Acting justly and with mercy involves both acting justly by adhering to the law of the land and acting with mercy by providing care and support for immigrants. The secular law determines who can be admitted to a specific jurisdiction. In contrast, Christians can accept and support any migrants or immigrants in the jurisdiction regardless of their legal status. Fittingly, there is no conflict between the requirement of Christians to follow just and appropriate secular laws and the duties of Christians to care for strangers and foreigners that come into their community.

The Bible tells Christians to abide by the laws of the land in which they live. Paul said, “For the one in authority is God’s servant for your good.”³² The passage indicates that Christians

²⁹ Matt 24:13.

³⁰ Mark 12:17.

³¹ Mic 6:8.

³² Rom 13:4.

should submit to secular authorities who are considered the servants of God. The ruler in authority maintains order and protects the people from outside threats, which creates a benefit for the people. Paul also indicates that Christians should give secular authorities their due, which includes respect and honor for authority as well as the payment of taxes.³³ The passage implies that Christians should follow the laws established by their rulers. Paul reiterates the need “to be subject to rulers and authorities” in his letter to Titus.³⁴ Peter also notes that Christians should submit to human authority for the sake of the Lord.³⁵ The passages suggest that Christians should abide by the laws made by leaders regardless of whether the individual leaders are followers of Christ and should act in a godly manner when making decisions.

In a commentary on Romans 13, Ellen White indicates that the Ruler of all nations is God the Omnipotent. The secular rulers of nations are God’s servants intended to keep the way of God in making laws and rendering judgment in accordance with Paul’s exhortation concerning secular authority. The rulers of nations must govern impartially and without hypocrisy, avoiding sinful practices such as taking bribes or using their positions for personal gain. Rulers should not undertake unjust actions or help others to act unjustly.³⁶ Rulers must act in a way that would merit God’s ratification of their decisions at the final judgment. The Bible describes the way a king should behave such as avoiding accumulating a large amount of gold and silver.³⁷ Even if a

³³ Rom 13:5-7.

³⁴ Titus 3:1.

³⁵ 1 Peter 2:13.

³⁶ White, *SDA*, p. 6:87.

³⁷ Deut 17:14-20.

ruler does not act in accordance with the principles described in the Bible, Christians must obey the laws established by the ruler.

The leaders of a nation have a responsibility to protect the citizens from harm. In general, the rulers of the various peoples discussed in the Old Testament had the ability to determine who could reside or pass through their land. In the context of migration and immigration, the incident occurring when Moses asked the king of Edom for permission to cross the land of the Edomites demonstrates the legitimate application of the decision of rulers to protect the borders of a nation.³⁸ The king of the Edomites refused twice to give permission for the Israelites to enter Edom even though the king was aware of the difficulties the Israelites faced in their journey after they left Egypt. Rather than try to force a way into Edom, Moses and the Israelites travelled around the boundaries of the kingdom. The demeanor of Moses demonstrated that the Israelites respected the decision of the king of Edom to protect the borders of the kingdom although the decision did not show the mercy towards people in need expected of a righteous leader.

The duty to obey the laws established by rulers applies equally to citizens and non-citizens that may be temporary migrants or immigrants intending to reside permanently in the nation. Nehemiah, as the appointed governor of Jerusalem, used the power of his position to ensure that the gates of the city were closed on the Sabbath to prevent gentiles from Tyre from entering the city to sell goods in violation of the laws concerning commerce on the Sabbath.³⁹

³⁸ Num 20:14-20.

³⁹ Neh 13:15-21.

The legitimate ruler of Jerusalem required non-citizens residing near the city to obey the local law even if they were not Israelites. The passage demonstrates the need for non-citizens in a jurisdiction to follow the local laws.

In the situation of Joseph inviting his family to migrate to Egypt, the offer was based on the legal authority that Pharaoh had placed in Joseph as his minister.⁴⁰ Joseph is an example of an immigrant who prospered in a new land by trusting in God. In the house of Potiphar, “the Lord WAS with Joseph so that he prospered.”⁴¹ Joseph followed God’s law by refusing the advances of Potiphar’s wife but was imprisoned because of her false accusation. In prison, Joseph continued to have faith in God that resulted in God giving him the gift of prophecy, leading to his rise to a prominent position in Pharaoh’s household.⁴² Trust in God resulted in Joseph accepting his circumstances as a slave of Potiphar, as a prisoner, and as a trusted advisor of Pharaoh.

In many other situations in the Bible involving migration, no legal barriers existed to prevent people from migrating to a different land in the absence of a direct objection by the nation’s ruler. David settled among the Philistines for a time to escape from Saul, who was determined to murder him.⁴³ Although the Philistines were the enemies of the Israelites, they did not object to David and his followers settling in their land. It was possible that the Philistines welcomed David because he was no longer part of Saul’s army and was an important factor in

⁴⁰ Gen 45:8-13.

⁴¹ Gen 39:2.

⁴² Gen 41:39-40.

⁴³ 1 Sam 27:1-4.

the Israelite victories over the Philistines.⁴⁴ The Bible reveals that David had many flaws revealed by his lust for Bathsheba, prompting him to order to Joab to put Bathsheba's husband Uriah in a position in battle that would lead to Uriah's death.⁴⁵ David also had many successes in life as a result of his faith in God, which he maintained during the time that he lived as an immigrant among the Philistines. To reward David's fidelity, God took the kingdom of Israel from Saul and gave it to David.⁴⁶ Another instance of migration in the Bible was the flight of Joseph and Mary to Egypt to safeguard the infant Jesus from Herod's order to slay the firstborn.⁴⁷ There were no restrictions to the movement of small groups of people such as a family to a new land with no requirement to seek permission from the authorities before entering the territory.

As various biblical narratives demonstrate, migrants and immigrants have a duty to obey the laws of the new countries or lands to which they have moved.⁴⁸ At the same time, Christian immigrants have a greater duty to follow the laws of God and to maintain their faith in Christ.⁴⁹ The biblical immigrants such as Joseph, David, and Joseph and Mary maintained their trust in God and followed the laws of God when living in other lands. In the modern environment, the requirement of adhering to local laws includes the need to obtain permission from the authorities of the new land in which a foreigner maintains residence when such authority is

⁴⁴ White, *SDA*, p. 2:1,022.

⁴⁵ 2 Sam 11:15.

⁴⁶ 1 Sam 28:15.

⁴⁷ Matt 2:13-15.

⁴⁸ Mark 12:17; Rom 13:1-7.

⁴⁹ Matt 22:21.

required for foreigners to settle in the land. Legal status can create greater opportunities for the immigrants such as access to some government programs that ease some of the burdens associated with settling in a new country. Notwithstanding, if a foreigner resides in a nation in a manner contrary to law, the legal status of the foreigner is not a consideration in the obligation of the Christian people who are already living in the land to provide physical and spiritual support to others in need. James tells us, “Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment.”⁵⁰

James’ comment reflects the supremacy of God’s law and faith in Christ over any secular or civil law. Paul affirms that in Christ, “all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him.”⁵¹ God’s law has primacy when in conflict with secular law. From a biblical perspective, immigrants that do not have legal status are not engaged in a sinful act because of the violation of secular law.

Pursuit of Worldly Goods as a Barrier to Contentment

An important part of the biblical teachings about contentment through Christ is the way the desire for riches and worldly goods undermines the ability to achieve contentment through Christ. Christ commands us, “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths

⁵⁰ Jam 2:12-13.

⁵¹ Col 1:16.

and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”⁵² Only God and faith in Christ can provide people with the spiritual treasure of the promise of eternal life in the New Earth after the second advent. Nevertheless, individuals who focus on material things will not achieve the contentment that comes from drawing close to God and will not be granted salvation at the final judgment.

Avoiding love of the world and the material goods and pleasures it offers is an important part of following Christ. John conveys to us, “Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever.”⁵³ The passage encourages Christians to abandon the love of worldly things because their love should be reserved for God. The world is a place of horrors fostered by Satan and the human disregard of the law of God.⁵⁴ While Christians must live in the world, they should remain apart from the world by focusing on spiritual matters. Focusing on the things of the world creates a space between the person and the Savior that Satan is eager to enter.⁵⁵ Consequently, John cautions that the love of the things of world diminishes the ability of the individual to love God.

⁵² Matt 6:19-21.

⁵³ 1 John 2: 15-17.

⁵⁴ White, *SDA*, p. 7:209.

⁵⁵ Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Stewardship*. (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing, 1940), p. 146.

This passage is particularly relevant for immigrants in the US that must remain apart from the world that offers far greater abundance of material things that may not have been available in their homeland.

The parable of the sower avows that, “The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful.”⁵⁶ Wealth can be deceitful because people can become consumed with the acquisition and management of wealth, drawing people away from God. Wealth purchases artificial luxury in the form of furnishings, clothes, and adornment crafted by human hands that cannot compare to the beauty that God has created in any flower found in the field.⁵⁷

The Bible specifically exhorts Christians to keep their lives free from the love of money and be content with what they have. God has told those who follow His law, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.”⁵⁸ The love of money includes covetousness for the material things of this world that can lead to desire and envy of others that have more possessions. God’s promise also implies that Christians should be content with their present circumstances. Their faith in Christ and adhering to God’s Law provides them with the assurance of salvation.

Paul discusses the difficulty of finding contentment through Christ because of the harm that can occur from pursuing material instead of spiritual things. He states that those who

⁵⁶ Matt 13:22.

⁵⁷ White, SDA, p. 6:1087.

⁵⁸ Heb 13:5.

desire riches and worldly goods fall into a trap that prevents them from achieving happiness and godliness.⁵⁹ The problem Paul identifies is the pursuit of worldly riches produces a transitory or ephemeral benefit, but nonetheless shifts a person's attention away from the spiritual goal of salvation that is the real purpose of life. Paul further believed that greed involving the acquisition of material goods is equivalent to sexual immorality that are both improper behaviors for the followers of Christ.⁶⁰

Ellen White indicates that the problem of greed and pursuit of riches continues to be an issue. She writes, "How many who have in adversity remained true to God, have fallen under the glittering allurements of prosperity. With the possession of wealth, the ruling passion of a selfish nature is revealed. The world is cursed today by the miserly greed and the self-indulgent vices of the worshipers of mammon."⁶¹ The world presents many temptations to lead people to focus on material wealth, which involves the sin of greed to acquire goods to fulfil personal desires. The focus on acquisition of wealth is like worshiping an idol because people cannot effectively worship God and follow His law if they are devoted to greed.

In the Old Testament, the pursuit of riches and the resulting sin can be distinguished from the wealth that is a blessing from God and used to benefit others. Hezekiah had accumulated a great deal of wealth as king of Israel. He demonstrated pride in his wealth and worldly goods by showing them to the representatives of the Babylonian king Baladan.⁶²

⁵⁹ 1 Tim 6:9-10.

⁶⁰ Eph 5:3.

⁶¹ White, *Counsels*, p. 139.

⁶² 2 Kings 20:12-13.

Hezekiah's pride in wealth was one of the sins of Israel contributing to the judgment of God in the form of the Babylonian captivity that was recorded to instruct people about the consequences of sin.⁶³

In contrast to those who take pride in wealth, God can bless those who follow His laws with wealth as He did with Abraham,⁶⁴ Solomon,⁶⁵ and others who pleased Him. The individuals blessed with wealth used their fortune to benefit others and recognized that it was a blessing from God. They did not focus on accumulation of additional wealth or took pride in having wealth. An example of appropriate use of wealth occurs in the Bible when David authorized his son Solomon to use his wealth to construct a temple that benefited all the people of Israel.⁶⁶ The appropriate use of wealth by David and Solomon contrasts with sin of prideful use of material goods by Hezekiah. The implication is that wealth by itself is not evil but rather people's improper attitudes towards the acquisition and use of wealth can lead to sin. For immigrants who God may bless with wealth can maintain a positive relationship with God by using the wealth to benefit others.

The New Testament also offers the example of the positive use of money by Cornelius who was a wealthy Roman centurion that had become God-fearing by believing in God after serving in the Roman military in Judea. He gave away his wealth to the poor demonstrating that

⁶³ Terri Saelee, "Migration and Adventist Mission." *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies*, 7, No. 2 (2011), p. 64.

⁶⁴ Gen 13:2.

⁶⁵ 1 Kings 10:23.

⁶⁶ 1 Chron 28-29.

he was a righteous person. As a result, God brought him to the Christian faith through the efforts of Peter.⁶⁷

People who have accumulated wealth, nevertheless, may have difficulty connecting with God. “But the ties that bind them to the world hold them firmly. It requires moral courage for these men to take their position with the lowly ones” who are not wealthy.⁶⁸ Christ warned of the difficulties that wealthy people have with finding salvation with the metaphor, “it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.”⁶⁹ In practice, it is not possible for a person to divide thoughts between God and the accumulation of the things of this world such as wealth.

Maintaining a spiritual focus on God requires people to ensure they correctly use the material goods with which they are blessed. In general, wealth should benefit the community and should not be used for personal pleasure as demonstrated by the examples of David, Solomon, and Cornelius. The approach to the positive use of money and wealth is consisted with Paul’s observation that Christians should “use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them.”⁷⁰ In effect, wealth should advance Christian objectives such as helping others in need or supporting the ability of Christians to undertake the Great Commission of going into the world and preaching the Gospel.

⁶⁷ Acts 10.

⁶⁸ Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*. (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing, 1905), p. 209.

⁶⁹ Matt 13:24.

⁷⁰ 1 Cor 7:31.

As the archdeceiver, Satan considers money and the pursuit of wealth one of the most significant tools to draw people away from God. Ellen White points out that Satan's plan is to make people care more for money than "the upbuilding of Christ's kingdom and the spread of the truths," which Satan and his accomplices hate.⁷¹ The love of money allows covetous and selfish people to fall under Satan's power, drawing these people away from God. Ellen White also upholds that,

If your thoughts, your plans, your purposes, are all directed toward the accumulation of the things of earth, your anxiety, your study, your interests, will all be centered upon the world. The heavenly attractions will lose their beauty.... Your heart will be with your treasure.... You will have no time to devote to the study of the Scriptures and to earnest prayer that you may escape the snares of Satan.⁷²

Christians have an obligation to stand apart from the world and its material trappings and move into the family of God and faith in Christ. As a result, the Bible and Christian beliefs must shape all the thoughts and activities of the members of the family of God. The habits of Christians should flow from biblical principles and not from the example set by the world.⁷³ The world is corrupt because it is under the influence of Satan. Consequently, the desire to gain worldly goods and material possessions undermines the ability of the individual to commit fully to following Christ and living in the simplicity of trusting in God. While immigrants may be motivated by the desire to have greater economic opportunities in their new country, the

⁷¹ White, *Counsels*, p. 154.

⁷² White, *Our High*, p. 200.

⁷³ Secretariat, General Convention of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*. (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing, 2015), p. 146.

material aspects of their lives should remain subordinate to their spiritual obligations as Christians.

Avoiding the temptation of materialism and finding contentment through Christ is part of a lifelong process of striving towards following God's law to gain salvation through God's grace. The process begins when people submit to Christ and dedicate their life to following God's law. Be that as it may, Christians should always be aware of the effect of the Great Controversy that is the struggle between God and Satan. People find themselves in middle of a war between Christ and Satan that began before God created the world⁷⁴ and will end only at the time of the last judgment when God destroys all evil.⁷⁵ Satan and his accomplices are the enemy of truth and righteousness, continually attempting to draw people away from God and toward evil.⁷⁶ Satan is eager to disrupt Christian contentment through Christ by using the temptations of worldly pleasures. The materialism surrounding immigrants to the US is part of the worldly pleasures creating temptations that disrupt Christian contentment.

The Great Controversy has a personal component in which all individuals must struggle to overcome the temptation to evil created by Satan and to persevere in the effort to follow Christ.⁷⁷ Focusing on achieving contentment through Christ can function as a bulwark against the snares of Satan such as materialism intended to draw us away from the path to salvation. At

⁷⁴ Rev 12:7-9.

⁷⁵ Rev 19:11-21.

⁷⁶ White, SDA, p. 7:201.

⁷⁷ Ed Christian, "The Process of Conversion as Explained by the Great Controversy Metaphor." *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, 10, Nos. 1-2, (1999), p. 214.

the same time, Christians must struggle each day to gain strength through Christ to withstand the temptations to lure people into sin.⁷⁸ Maintaining a focus on God rather than on the things of the world is necessary to be successful in the struggle against Satan's worldly temptations.

God provides direction in the Bible concerning appropriate treatment of migrants and immigrants identified as foreigners in the Old Testament. God commanded the Israelites to avoid mistreating foreigners and to provide them with assistance when necessary, with the failure to abide by God's law considered a sin.⁷⁹ Christians have a duty to act justly by adhering to secular law and to act mercifully towards immigrants by providing assistance.⁸⁰ Meeting this obligation can include providing immigrants with the material and spiritual support to help them adjust to the new country and to develop contentment through Christ.

Contentment through Christ is a condition in which Christians are satisfied with what they have and trust in God to provide what they need.⁸¹ Contentment through Christ enables people to focus on Christ's desire that we focus on spiritual matters and rather than the acquisition of material wealth.⁸² Love of the things of this world and the pursuit of worldly goods distracts people from the love of God.⁸³

⁷⁸ White, *SDA*, p. 7:204.

⁷⁹ Deut 27:19; Ex 12:49; Matt 25:35; Rom 15:10; Phil 3:20.

⁸⁰ Rom 13:4-7.

⁸¹ Phil 4:11-13; 1 Tim 6:6–12:2; Cor 12:9; Rom 8:29.

⁸² Matt 6:19-21.

⁸³ 1 John 2: 15-17.

Conclusion

God provides direction in the Bible concerning appropriate commands regarding the situation of immigrants in a new land faced with the challenges of maintaining their faith and developing contentment through Christ. Contentment through Christ is a condition in which Christians are satisfied with what they have and trust in God to provide what they need.⁸⁴ Contentment through Christ enables people to focus on Christ's desire that we focus on spiritual matters and rather than the acquisition of material wealth.⁸⁵

One of the most significant barriers for immigrants becoming content through Christ is the materialism embedded in American culture. Immigrants have an expectation that they will enjoy greater prosperity in their new land. Focus on the acquisition of material goods, however, can undermine their relationship with Christ and lead to unhappiness.⁸⁶ Striving towards contentment through Christ is important for immigrants to accept their circumstances with their relationship with Christ as the center of their lives.

⁸⁴ Phil 4:11-13; 1 Tim 6:6-12:2; Cor 12:9; Rom 8:29.

⁸⁵ Matt 6:19-21.

⁸⁶ Matt 6:19-25; 13:22; 1 John 2:15-17.

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

A substantial amount of literature exists concerning the AD, its shortcomings for immigrants, and the importance of contentment through Christ. The literature contained in the review presented in this chapter was selected based on its relevance to the concepts under investigation and the reliability of the source. The following literature review encompasses sections with discussions related to the AD, taking faith back from AD, Christian and American immigrants, and immigrant families with children. It also covers church-based programs for immigrant children and families, spiritual leadership and Christian contentment in times of flux, church organizational leadership in times of flux, and gaps in the literature.

Migrants and Immigrants in the Bible

God provides clear direction in the Bible concerning the duty of Christians to welcome migrants and immigrants to a new land. The Bible translations use the term foreigners¹ or strangers² to indicate an individual or group is not a part of an existing community. The Old Testament uses the Hebrew word *ger* to describe anyone who is not currently a member of the

¹ Deut 10:19.

² 1 Chron 16: 19; Heb 13:2.

community, which means alien.³ The concept of foreigner or stranger includes individuals from another cultural or ethnic group that live by different customs and practices but nonetheless can live among the Israelites. The foreigner is fundamentally an outsider who may visit a community or settle in the community. In both cases, the Israelites were encouraged to extend hospitality to foreigner and the foreigners were expected to live by the laws of the community.

When speaking to Moses, God commanded “When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them.”⁴ The concept of foreigner includes individuals residing among the Israelites temporarily as migrants that may be considered as guests or temporary workers who were not part of the community or as immigrants permanently residing with in community without becoming Israelites.⁵ The command given to Moses implies that Christians should not take any action that could result in mistreatment of the strangers and foreigners residing in their land.

Regardless of the reception that Christians experience when immigrating to a new land, immigrants often experience emotional and material adversity in a new country. Emotional suffering can arise from separation from loved ones in the home country or anxiety about the future in the new land. Immigrants often have difficulty finding work and adjusting to their new country, creating material hardships.⁶ The Bible contains many passages that provide

³ Jennifer Lee Koh, “Agape, Grace, and Immigration: An Evangelical Perspective.” *Agape, Justice, and Law* edited by Robert Cochran and Zachary Calo, (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2017), p. 38.

⁴ Lev 19:33.

⁵ Lev 22:10.

⁶ Cindy Sangalang, et al., “Trauma, Post-Migration Stress, and Mental Health.” *Immigrant Minority Health*, 21 (2019), p. 910.

encouragement to Christians who experience adversity. For example, “Cast your cares on the LORD and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous be shaken”⁷ urges us to depend on God during times of adversity. Paul also told us to view adversity in a positive light because “we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”⁸

Abraham’s encounter with three strangers that came to him when he was resting beneath a tree is an example of the condition of the potential adversity that migrants face.⁹ Abraham and Sarah were themselves migrants who had left their homeland in response to a promise from God of a blessing on Abraham’s descendants.¹⁰ When Abraham sees the strangers approaching, he assumes they are migrants from a distant land that are facing hardships. He provided them with water and food, which in the context of the harsh conditions in the Middle East at the time were life-sustaining resources.¹¹ Abraham understood the difficulties faced by strangers who come to a new land because of his own experiences. He had abandoned his previous life to encounter unknown peoples and situations in the land he was promised by God.

The strangers were in fact angels important enough to be recorded in Scripture.¹² Nevertheless, Abraham did not know they were angels and saw only tired people who had

⁷ Psalm 55:22.

⁸ Rom 8:28.

⁹ Gen 18:1-8.

¹⁰ Gen 12:1-5.

¹¹ Miguel Diaz, “On Loving Strangers: Encountering the Mystery of God in the Face of Migrants.” *Word and World*, 29, No. 3 (2009), p. 236.

¹² Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*. (2018; reis. Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1890), p. 116.

come to a new land. Abraham followed the law of God in his adopted land by providing help to others in need. While the main focus of the account is on Abraham's behavior towards strangers, the narrative also tells us how God provides for the needs of His people. The three strangers received refreshment to sustain them, which was part of God's plan.

The Israelites became wandering strangers after they left Egypt, which demonstrates how faith in God can sustain migrants in dire conditions. They had suffered emotional and physical trauma from exile, slavery, and the feeling of otherness among the inhabitants of foreign lands.¹³ During the period of wandering, faith in God's promise that they would come to a new land of milk and honey sustained them.¹⁴ They also had to fashion tassels for their clothes to remind them to remain faithful to God's laws.¹⁵ Modern immigrants are analogous to the Israelites wandering in the desert who can eventually come to the promised land of salvation if they remain faithful to God's law despite adversity and hardship.

Paul's emphasis on contentment through Christ is applicable to the situation of immigrants finding themselves in an unfriendly or even hostile environment in their new country. Paul tells us to be "content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want"¹⁶ because of the strength that God provides. The contentment is the result of the energy Christ so powerfully works in us.¹⁷ Striving towards

¹³ Diaz, *On Loving*, p. 237.

¹⁴ Robert Hughes and J. Carl Laney, *Tyndale Concise Bible Commentary*. (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1990), p. 62.

¹⁵ Num 15:37-41.

¹⁶ Phil 4:12.

¹⁷ Col 1:29.

contentment in Christ helps immigrants contend with adversity by understanding that God is the source of their strength and will keep His promises to those with faith in Christ just as He kept His promises to Israel.

Various Bible passages also create an expectation among Christian immigrants that they will be accepted as equals in the Christian communities in their new land. For example, Moses commanded the Levite priests to tell the people “Cursed is anyone who withholds justice from the foreigner,”¹⁸ which creates the expectation that foreigners residing among the Israelites should be treated fairly. God also directly told Moses and Aaron, “The same law applies both to the native-born and to the foreigner residing among you,”¹⁹ further emphasizing the concept of equality for foreigners living among the Israelites. Moses also communicated the law with “Do not mistreat or oppress a foreigner, for you were foreigners in Egypt.”²⁰ The passage directly connects the suffering of the Israelites as wanderers is similar to the suffering of other immigrants. As a result, Christian immigrants in a new land consider themselves part of the same community with other Christians who will not mistreat or oppress them.

The expectation among Christian immigrants that they will receive aid and support from their fellow Christians in the new land continues in the New Testament. In the description of the judgment of nations when Christ as the Son of Man returns in the second coming, the sheep are separated from the goats. In the final judgment to determine who shall be admitted into the Kingdom that God has prepared for the faithful, an important criterion was providing support

¹⁸ Deut 27:19.

¹⁹ Ex 12:49.

²⁰ Ex 22:21.

for strangers. Jesus stated, “I was a stranger and you invited me in.”²¹ The verse suggests that providing help and support for strangers and foreigners in a new environment is like inviting Jesus into the community, and a duty for Christians.

Paul emphasizes that we are equal in the sight of God when he affirms, “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”²² Paul also pronounces that Christians have a duty to accept each other regardless of the place of origin or customs of others by stating, “Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.”²³ Paul reinforces the idea that Christians are citizens of heaven rather than the nation in which they live when he wrote, “But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ.”²⁴ By accepting Christ, Christians often develop the expectation that other Christians will treat them fairly and equally, which includes providing assistance to immigrants in a new and strange lands.

When viewed together, the various Bible verses concerning strangers and foreigners indicate that maintaining faith in Christ is the cornerstone for dealing with the adversity and hardships immigrants encounter. Living by biblical principles concerning fair treatment of others leads to accepting newcomers from foreign lands into existing Christian communities and

²¹ Matt 25:35.

²² Ga 3:28.

²³ Rom 15:7.

²⁴ Phil 3:20.

congregations. The common faith of Christians in Christ minimizes the significance of different cultural norms and practices that lead to superficial social differences.²⁵

The American Dream

The concept of the AD is part of the ethos of the US and suggests that it is possible to achieve prosperity through hard work. The AD also implies that realizing other personal ambitions such as educational attainment is possible in the US.²⁶ The AD is fundamentally a narrative that constructs an imagined nation that is mythical and based on exaggeration of facts.²⁷ It has two components of implying that a person can achieve success through work and that a person can be successful regardless of background or origin. The difficulty with the definition of the AD is that the idea of success can vary among individuals. Most people in the US consider prosperity as demonstrated by material goods as the primary measure of success.²⁸ Immigrants often believe that success is assimilation into the American middle class with sufficient income to live a middle-class lifestyle and better opportunities for their children.²⁹

²⁵ Ronald Lawson, "When Immigrants Take Over: The Impact of Immigrant Growth on Seventh-Day Adventism's Trajectory from Sect to Denomination." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 38, No. 1 (1999), p. 90.

²⁶ Mark Rank, et al., *Chasing the American Dream*. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 3.

²⁷ Richard Profozich, "The American Dream: A Still Viable Concept of American Exceptionalism?" *Journal of American Studies of Turkey*, 19 (2004), p. 107.

²⁸ Mara Cohen-Marks and Christopher Stout, "Can the American Dream Survive the New Multiethnic America? Evidence from Los Angeles." *Sociological Forum*, 26, No. 4 (2011), p. 824.

²⁹ William Clark, *Immigrants and the American Dream*. (New York, NY: Guilford Press, 2004), p. 4.

Both immigrants and people born in the US are increasingly doubtful of their ability to achieve the AD because of growing inequalities in society.³⁰ While many immigrants are optimistic about achieving the financial gain, ownership of material goods, and social mobility associated with the AD, a growing proportion of immigrants believe the expectations fostered by the AD ethos are unrealistic and unattainable.³¹ The realization that the AD may be beyond reach produces frustration that can create resentment and stress.

The AD is a fictional concept that has no clear definition. Alfredo Carballo argues that the understanding of the AD among immigrants is based on the stories told by people who have come to the US to the people remaining behind in the home country.³² The stories about immigrants that circulate in other nations also emphasize the successes of a few individuals who came to the US and became very wealthy, socially mobile, and achieved their ambition for a materially better life.³³ The media contributes to the stories about the benefits of life in the US. The stories tend to minimize the difficulties that many immigrants actually face with adjusting to life in the US, which creates conflict between the expectations of immigrants and their experiences after immigration. Another perspective of the AD is that the concept is a statement of exceptionalism based on the availability of opportunity, with the specific narrative change

³⁰ Jennifer Wolack and David Peterson, "The Dynamic American Dream." *American Journal of Political Science*, 64, No. 4 (2020), p. 969.

³¹ Richard Cervantes, et al., "Optimism and the American Dream: Latino Perspectives on Opportunities and Challenges toward Reaching Family Goals." *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences*, 43, No. 3 (2021), p. 149.

³² Alfredo Carballo, "The American Dream in Transnational Migratory Circuit." *European Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies*, No. 108 (2019), p. 23.

³³ Rank, *Chasing*, p. 61.

over times with evolving opportunities.³⁴ Yet, the shortcoming of the exceptionalism perspective is it overlooks the difficulties encountered in everyday life that do not fit the general narrative of availability of opportunities.

There are many reasons as to why many immigrants coming to the US have difficulty assimilating into American culture, which frustrates achieving the AD. Immigrants often lack the language skills, knowledge of institutions and informal business systems, and personal networks to obtain good jobs.³⁵ As a result, immigrants feel that they are living in a hostile environment and tend to cluster with other immigrants from the same nation to recreate some of the cultural aspects of their homeland. Ethnic clustering further reduces the availability of opportunities to participate in the mainstream culture that can negatively affect families and their children.³⁶

Taking Faith Back from the American Dream

The literature related to taking Christian faith back from the AD generally recognizes the conflict between the ideology embedded in the AD and biblical principles.³⁷ The AD represents the belief system of worldly kingdoms in which personal ambition and desire for gratification guide the way people gain and spend wealth. In contrast, Christian beliefs call for moderation in

³⁴ Gundo Rial y Costas, "Translating the American Dream: A Brazilian Vision of the Promised Land." *Postcolonial Relocations* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), p. 376.

³⁵ Sarah Mahler, *American Dreaming: Immigrant Life on the Margins*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 10.

³⁶ Sako Musterd, et al., "Are Immigrants Earnings Influenced by the Characteristics of their Neighborhoods?" *Economic and Planning*, A 40 (2008), p. 798.

³⁷ Danielle Mayfield, *The Myth of the American Dream*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020), pp. 13-14.

the accumulation of wealth and encourages using wealth to help others in the community that may be in need. Recapturing faith undermined by the AD requires recognizing that the values associated with the AD are spiritually harmful and reaffirming commitment to biblical values that consider materialism as another form of idolatry.³⁸

Research suggests that religious faith has a generally moderating effect on materialistic desires of immigrants.³⁹ Nonetheless, religious faith and materialism in American society are in tension, with numerous social forces pulling people away from religious belief. David Platt offers a discussion focusing on how the AD rooted in materialism has a negative effect on Christians by encouraging people to worship themselves through striving for a comfortable life rather than worshipping Jesus.⁴⁰ Christ called on people to abandon the attachments of this world, which includes material goods and comforts. Yet, many people spend their lives pursuing wealth rather than proclaiming the Kingdom of God. Therefore, Christians that emphasize the acquisition of material goods by believing in the AD cannot be living by biblical principles because they do not abandon themselves to the will of God.

In a discussion of the conflict between materialism and religion, Sarah Konig identifies the origin of the concept of the AD.⁴¹ The emergence of the Protestant ethic in the 17th century

³⁸ Lisa Surdyk, "God's Economy: Teaching Students Key Biblical Principles." *The Journal of Bible Integration in Business*, 8, No. 1 (2002), p.74.

³⁹ Mohammadali Zolfagharian and Ebru Ulusoy, "Intra-Governmental Pendula: Toward a Theory of Immigrant Identity, Materialism, and Religiosity." *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 34, No. 3 (2017), p. 679.

⁴⁰ David Platt, *Radical: Taking Back Your Faith from the American Dream*. (Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah Publishing, 2010), p. 13.

⁴¹ Sarah Konig, "Almighty God and the Almighty Dollar: The Study of Religion and the Market Economies in the United States." *Religion Compass*, 10, No. 4 (2016), pp. 84-87.

stressed the importance of work for its own sake, which was considered a positive attribute. As the market economy of the US developed in the 19th century, the Protestant ethic morphed into a secularized belief system regarding the social importance of acquiring wealth. Over time, work and acquisition became an ethos divorced from religion and functioning as an independent belief system. The change in the importance of work was the result in a shift in the perception of agency, with human efforts to acquire material benefits replacing the idea of reliance on God.⁴²

The conflict between the principles of Christian beliefs and the AD is the result of emphasis on the individual in American society.⁴³ The individual attributes financial success and the acquisition of material goods to personal efforts and considers others who do not meet the same standards of wealth as unworthy. The concept excludes the possibility that individuals owe their material blessings to God and not to their personal efforts. The result of emphasis on the individual in American society is the emergence of the AD as a form of civil religion that competes with Christianity to define the values and norms of American society.⁴⁴ The perspective further suggests that taking back Christian faith requires rejecting the materialism associated with the AD.

A contrasting view discussed by Tony Lin suggests that the AD is not inherently in conflict with Christian beliefs because it can encourage people who come to America to create a society

⁴² Jim Cullen, *The American Dream: A Short History of an Idea That Shaped a Nation*. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 2.

⁴³ Adrian Mack, *God Bless America: The Discourse Between the American Dream and Christianity*. (Bloomington, IN: Author House, 2013), p. 16.

⁴⁴ Laurence Samuel, *The American Dream: A Cultural History*. (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2012), p. 2.

in accordance with biblical principles and God's will.⁴⁵ The view focuses on the use of wealth to benefit others. However, the perspective is not in accordance with biblical principles because it contends that God wants the faithful to be prosperous, with the idea of prosperity subject to variable personal interpretation. Scripture indicates that Christians should abandon worldly attachments to follow Christ.⁴⁶ Happiness comes from the worldly effort of attempting to emulate Christ by providing physical support to other people in need and by teaching them about God while living a life in accordance with God's law to prepare for everlasting life.⁴⁷

Another perspective concerning the relationship of Christians to the AD is to urge Christians to remake the AD concept in accordance with biblical principles.⁴⁸ The perspective considers Christians as reclaiming the AD to represent the opportunity to worship openly and to care for families and community. The reclaimed AD focuses on benefits to the collective community and emphasizes the dignity and worth of all individuals. Consequently, the AD would come to represent Christian ideals for a society rather the current ethos of materialism, which would eliminate the negative aspects of the way the majority interpret the AD.

The harm caused by pursuit of material goods is supported by sociological observations as well as Bible teaching. People that do not pursue materialism are generally happier and have

⁴⁵ Tony Lin, "The Gospel of the American Dream." *Hedgehog Review*, 15, No. 2 (2013), p. 39.

⁴⁶ Matt 6:19-21; Heb 13:5; Col 3:1-4.

⁴⁷ Katharine Schori, "The Pursuit of Happiness in the Christian Tradition: Goal and Journey." *Journal of Law and Religion*, 29, No. 1 (2014), p. 58.

⁴⁸ Frank Thomas, *The American Dream 2.0: The Christian Way Out of the Great Recession*. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2012), p. 149.

greater life satisfaction than people consumed with acquisition of material goods.⁴⁹ On the other hand, the sociological observations do not provide insight to prompt people to abandon materialism. In contrast, the Bible offers guidance to help people achieve happiness. Christian happiness includes an appreciation of all that God has given to the individual rather than longing for the things that the individual does not have. Christians also believe that true happiness can come only from following God, and eventually receiving salvation for the faithful.⁵⁰

Christians and American Immigrants

The literature discussing Christianity and immigrants generally indicates that biblical principles require Christians to accept immigrants and to treat them fairly. Immigrants are in the same position as strangers or foreigners in the Bible with Christians expected to offer hospitality.⁵¹ One strand of the literature focuses on the types of government policies that are consistent with biblical teachings concerning immigrants. The history of Christian support for different immigration policies in the US has vacillated between the extremes of exclusion of some groups and support of an open immigration policy.⁵² One approach to assessing immigration policies is to determine if the policy balances order, freedom, and justice for

⁴⁹ Valeriu Frunzaru and Elena Frunzaru, “Materialism and Life Satisfaction: A Sociological and Christian Comparative Approach.” *Journal for the Study of Religion and Ideology*, 16, No. 48 (2017), p. 34.

⁵⁰ Andrzej Zwolinski, “The Christian Understanding of Happiness.” *The Person and Challenges*, 6, No 1. (2016), p. 84.

⁵¹ Susanna Snyder, “The Dangers of Doing Our Duty: Reflections on Churches Engaging with People Seeking Asylum in the UK.” *Theology*, 110, No. 857 (2007), p. 351.

⁵² Dennis Hollinger, “The Role of Government and the Immigration Issue: A Christian Ethics Perspective.” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 63, No. 4 (2020), pp. 759-760.

immigrants and residents in the US. Based on the framework, exclusion does not promote freedom while excessive immigration leading to low employment does not promote justice. Even so, regardless of the policies adopted by government entities, Christians tend to be more accepting of Christian immigrants than immigrants following other religions.⁵³

The issue examined in another strand of the literature is the extent of the Christian role relative to the biblical principle of sanctuary toward immigrants when the law creates the arbitrary distinction between an authorized or documented immigrant and an unauthorized or undocumented immigrant.⁵⁴ In most Christian churches, immigrants are welcome without reference to their documentation status, which prioritizes the biblical duty to help immigrants.⁵⁵ Under current law, it is not illegal for congregations to provide support or assistance to undocumented immigrants.⁵⁶ Many school systems now have special funding to assist the children of undocumented immigrants in areas such as English as a second language (ESL), although many of the immigrants are unaware of the special assistance programs.⁵⁷

⁵³ Eric McDaniel, et al., “Dividing Boundaries: How Religion Shapes Citizen’s Attitudes Toward Immigrants.” *American Politics Research*, 39, No. 1 (2011), p. 206.

⁵⁴ Timothy Sanapatiratne and Brian Aadland, “A Contemporary Theology of Sanctuary as It Relates to Undocumented and Displaced People.” *Word and World*, 39, No. 2 (2019), p. 139.

⁵⁵ Patricia Ehrkamp and Caroline Nagel, “Under the Radar: Undocumented Immigrants, Christian Faith Communities, and the Precarious Spaces of Welcome in the U.S. South.” *Annals of the Association of U.S. Geographers*, 104, No. 2 (2014), p. 321.

⁵⁶ Johnathan Augustine, “A Theology of Welcome: Faith-Based Considerations of Immigrants as Strangers in a Foreign Land.” *Connecticut Public Interest Law Journal*, 19, No. 2 (2020), p. 252.

⁵⁷ Jennifer Van Hook and Jennifer Glick, “Spanning Borders, Cultures, and Generations: A Decade of Research on Immigrant Families.” *Journal of Marriage and Families*, 82, No. 1 (2020), p. 231.

Alex Sackey-Ansah observes that hospitality for foreigners, including migrants, has been an important part of the traditions of both the Israelites and Christians in the Bible.⁵⁸ As described in Acts,⁵⁹ the early Christians cooperated to ensure that all followers of Christ did not lack the basic necessities of life, which demonstrated that all Christians were part of a fellowship. The basic goal of modern immigrants is to improve the standard of living and to find refuge from war or other adverse conditions. Christians are obliged to treat foreigners or immigrants with love and respect. The obligations of Christians include providing assistance to immigrants whenever necessary regardless of legal status.

A discussion of the attitudes of Christians toward immigration in the US by Kristen Heyer argues that many Christians are opposed to immigration and particularly undocumented immigration.⁶⁰ The opposition is a result of the influence of rhetoric concerning the economic and security threat posed by immigrants. Individuals that oppose immigration based on perceived threats elevate personal safety above the biblical principles of fair and equitable treatment for immigrants as foreigners. Christine Pohl has a similar position indicating that the secular rhetoric concerning safety overpowers the perception of the obligation of Christians to care for strangers.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Alex Sackey-Ansah, "Ethical Theories and Approaches to Immigration int the United States: Focus on Undocumented Immigrants." *Transformation: An International Journal of Holistic Mission Studies*, 38, No. 2 (2021), p. 143.

⁵⁹ Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-37.

⁶⁰ Kristen Heyer, *Kinship Across Borders: A Christian Ethisc of Immigration*. (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2012), p. 36.

⁶¹ Christine Pohl, "Responding to Strangers: Insights from the Christian Tradition." *Studies in Christian Ethics*, 19, No. 1 (2006), p. 82.

Some research has investigated the impact of immigration on religious practice in the adopted country. Because the US traditionally claimed to be a Christian country and continues to have a strong Christian religious presence, Christian immigrants can theoretically become part of mainstream American life while continuing to practice their religion.⁶² For Christian immigrants in the American cultural context, the desire to continue practicing Christianity is compatible with the nation's foundational tradition of living by Christian beliefs in public and private life.⁶³

Despite the Christian traditions that are part of the foundational culture of the US, evidence exists that, for many immigrant Christians, the process of moving to the US results in alienation from religious practice. The immigrants retain their religious beliefs yet change their religious behaviors in response to the pressures of acculturation in the US. The lapse in practice is the result of the time-consuming processes associated with acculturation such as learning a new language, negotiating a strange culture, and obtaining employment.⁶⁴ As a result, they often do not have sufficient time to engage in the same level of religious practice as in their home country. After an extended period of living in the US, the reduced religious behaviors become habitual and may result in the erosion of faith. In view of that, a challenge exists for American Christian churches to develop approaches to encourage immigrants to prioritize religious practice including prayer and church attendance.

⁶² Carolyn Chen, "From Filial Piety to Religious Piety: Evangelical Christianity Reconstructing Taiwanese Immigrant Families." *International Migration Review*, 40, No.3 (2006), p. 574.

⁶³ William Portier, "Inculcation as Transformation: The Case of Americanism Revisited." *U.S. Catholic Historian*, 11, No. 3 (1993), p. 109.

⁶⁴ Douglas Massey and Monica Higgins, "The Effects of Immigration on Religious Beliefs and Practice: A Theologizing or Alienating Experience?" *Social Science Research*, 40, No. 5 (2011), p. 1,372.

Another strand of the literature concerning Christianity and American immigrants investigated their impact on domestic churches. Gemma Cruz argued that over the long run most immigrants shed many elements of their home culture to adopt the culture of the new country, with the exception of religion.⁶⁵ Immigrants and migrants do not change their religious beliefs to adjust to the new country, but rather seek out congregations of individuals that have similar beliefs. The attempt to live by faith in a new cultural context results in a process of inculturation in which immigrants can shape the way in which the church in the adopted country express religious beliefs.⁶⁶ Immigrant influences on Christian churches include adoption of different religious practices and creation of new support systems to meet the needs of Christian congregants from varied cultural backgrounds.

Immigrant Families with Children

Many of the people immigrating to the US are seeking a better life for their families, even if they are not immediately accompanied by family members. Immigrants also rely heavily on emotional support from family members to sustain them in the difficult situations they find in the US such as low-paying work and a population that is often hostile.⁶⁷ At the same time, family members, including children, recognize they are living in a host society that expects them

⁶⁵ Gemma Cruz, “A New Way of Being Christian: The Contribution of Migrants to the Church.” *Contemporary Issues in Migration and Theology* edited by Elaine Padilla and Peter Phan. (New York, NY: Palgrave McMillan, 2013), p. 96.

⁶⁶ Portier, “Inculturation,” p. 113.

⁶⁷ Vincent Parillo, “The Immigrant Family: Securing the American Dream.” *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, 22, No. 2 (1991), p. 131.

to conform to the local customs and values with the rate of adaptation among children dependent on age when arriving in the US.⁶⁸

Some literature examines the issues facing immigrant families with young children. A study by the Urban Institute indicated that one quarter of the children under the age of six in the US are in immigrant families.⁶⁹ The families tend to be poor and have parents with low educational attainment. Many of the children in these families start school at an educational disadvantage to other students because they might not speak English. Part of the problem with early childhood development for the children of immigrant families is insufficient preschool opportunities and concerns, inability to pay preschool fees, and parental concerns about immigration status inhibiting involvement with schools. Research also indicates that the lower educational attainment of immigrant parents is a barrier to involvement in the education of children after arriving in the US.⁷⁰

Low familiarity with the American educational system also deters many immigrant parents from taking an active role in the education of their children.⁷¹ Another barrier to obtaining education for children among immigrant parents is the perception that the school is undermining the parents' ability to transmit their cultural heritage and their values to

⁶⁸ Alejandro Portes and Alejandro Rivas, "The Adaptation of Migrant Children." *The Future of Children*, 21, No. 1 (2011), p. 220.

⁶⁹ Heather Sandstrom and Julia Gelatt, "Childcare Choices of Low-Income Immigrant Families with Children." *Urban Institute*, 2017, <https://www.immigrationresearch.org/system/files/child-care-choices-of-low-income-immigrant-families-with-young-children.pdf>

⁷⁰ Van Hook and Glick, *Spanning*, p. 21.

⁷¹ Kirsten Lao and Grace Kao, "Barriers to School Involvement: Are Immigrant Parents Disadvantaged?" *The Journal of Educational Research*, 102, No. 4 (2009), p. 260

children.⁷² The attitude of teachers towards the language of minority students can also have a negative effect on students and the ability of parents to participate in the educational process. Research by Sarah Blanchard and Chandra Muller found that some teachers have an unsupportive attitude towards children born in the US in immigrant families when the child does not speak English as a primary language.⁷³

In a study conducted for the article “Immigrant Families Use of Early Childcare: Predictors of Care Type,” the authors investigate the childcare and early educational preferences of immigrant families with young children.⁷⁴ The findings of this study indicate that the most important factor influencing decisions concerning childcare is maternal employment, with working mothers more likely to use childcare and early educational programs. Another significant factor was the availability of a family member to provide care for children. Many immigrants also prefer informal childcare services such as a neighbor to formal care provided by an organization. Thus, this study does not consider the availability of church operated childcare or preschool services in the decisions of parents. Another study by Cecilia Obeng finds that immigrant parents prefer family members to provide care for young children when the family is from a collective culture in their home country.⁷⁵ The use of a formal childcare center is

⁷² Parillo, *The Immigrant*, p. 132.

⁷³ Sarah Blanchard and Chandra Muller, “Gatekeepers of the American Dream: How Teachers’ Perceptions Shape the Academic Outcomes of Immigrant and Language-Minority Students.” *Social Science Research*, 51 (2015), p. 266.

⁷⁴ Portia Miller, Elizabeth Votruba-Drzal, Rebekah Coley, and Amanda Koury, “Immigrant Families Use of Early Childcare: Predictors of Care Type.” *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 29, No. 4 (2014), p. 488.

⁷⁵ Cecilia Obeng, “Immigrant Family and Childcare Preferences.” *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 34 (2007), p. 260.

considered a second choice only if a family member is not available and the family can afford the fees for a formal childcare center.

An analysis of data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Survey conducted by Katherine Magnusson, Claudia LaHaye, and Jane Waldfogel shows that the children of immigrants are less likely to be enrolled in a preschool program operated by a childcare center.⁷⁶ The same study reveals that preschool attendance raises the elementary school readiness level of immigrant children to a level similar to children from non-immigrant families. Nonetheless, immigrant families may be reluctant to enroll their children in center-based preschools because of concerns such as cost and immigration status.⁷⁷ The reluctance of undocumented families to become involved with schools has a negative effect on the academic success of their children. Research examining the relationship between staff composition in preschools and the choice of immigrant families to use a formal preschool points out that the presence of immigrant staff from the same nationality as the child has a positive influence on the enrollment of immigrant children.⁷⁸

Research investigating the preferences of immigrant families for using early childcare and preschools supports that parents consider more than the issues of necessity of childcare for work and convenience when selecting schools.⁷⁹ Parents assess factors such as whether the

⁷⁶ Katherine Magnusson, Claudia LaHaye, and Jane Waldfogel, "Preschool and School Readiness of Immigrant Children." *Social Science Quarterly* 87, No. 5 (2006), pp. 1,250-1,257.

⁷⁷ Arya Ansari and Robert Crosnoe, "Immigration and the Interplay of Parenting, Preschool Enrollment, and Young Children's Academic Skills." *Journal of Family Psychology*, 29, No. 3 (2015), p. 385.

⁷⁸ Jennifer Adair, "Creating Positive Contexts of Reception: The Value of Immigrant Teachers in U.S. Early Childhood Education Programs." *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 24, No. 1 (2016), p. 3.

⁷⁹ Arya Ansari, et al., "What Do Parents Want from Preschool? Perspectives of Low-Income Latino/Immigrant Families." *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 52 (2020), pp. 42-46.

school provides a developmentally appropriate environment for children and the willingness of the preschool to incorporate parents into programs when parents are available. Particularly important to immigrant parents is the distrust of parents for neighborhood preschools, fearing that their children would not receive the same attention and educational opportunities as other children because of bias.

The findings of the research above described are limited because the study examined immigrant parents' perceptions in only one neighborhood in Texas. Other research are evidence that, despite possible shortcomings, preschools operated in childcare centers are more effective in preparing the children of immigrant families for elementary school because of the greater exposure to the English language from peers and teachers.⁸⁰ Be that as it may, immigrant parents are often realistic about the difficulties their children encounter when learning in English and recognize that learning in a new language may take additional time.⁸¹

The cost of the childcare or preschool is also a factor influencing the decision of immigrant families to use formal programs.⁸² Some nonprofit organizations offer free childcare for immigrant families to help children learn a new language and to improve readiness for school. An additional objective is to provide the childcare support necessary to permit parents to find employment. In general, immigrant families prefer a low-cost option for childcare, with

⁸⁰ Elizabeth Vortruba-Drzal, et al., "Center-Based Preschool and School Readiness Skills of Children from Immigrant Families." *Early Education and Development*, 26, No. 4 (2015), p. 552.

⁸¹ Jennifer Adair and Alejandra Barraza, "Voices of Immigrant Parents in Preschool Settings." *Young Children*, 69, No. 4 (2014), p. 34.

⁸² Peter Brandon, "The Childcare Arrangements of Immigrant Families in the United States," *International Migration*, 42, No. 1 (2004), p. 77.

cost being a contributing factor to select family members or neighbors as child care providers.⁸³

Research examining the effect of free childcare services in some areas and not in others supports that free childcare increases participation in the childcare and preschool services among immigrant families by 15%.⁸⁴ Even so, the provision of free childcare did not result in more mothers finding employment.

Church-Based Programs for Immigrant Children and Families

Childcare and preschool services offered by churches are exempt from government regulations concerning the way the service operates and do not require a license to operate under state laws. This reduces some of the barriers for churches to create a childcare and preschool program.⁸⁵ Some jurisdictions also offer a voluntary certification program for church operated childcare and preschool programs to demonstrate the service meets the same standards of quality as regulated facilities. The regulations concerning childcare and preschool programs have an association with higher quality of outcomes in terms of child safety and learning. Regardless of whether a church program seeks certification, the operation of the childcare and preschool services should reflect the general standards set by the government to ensure the children receive adequate care and learning opportunities.

⁸³ Karen Wall and Jose Jose, "Managing Work and Care: A Difficult Challenge for Immigrant Families." *Social Policies and Administration*, 28, No. 6 (2004), p. 599.

⁸⁴ Nina Drange and Kjetil Telle, "Promoting Integration of Immigrants: Effects of Free Childcare on Child Enrollment and Parental Employment." *Labor Economics*, 34 (2015), p. 28.

⁸⁵ Joellen Lewder and James Elicker, "Church Sponsored Childcare: Association of Regulatory Level with Quality." *International Journal of Childcare and Educational Policy*, 7 (2013), pp. 70-75.

Creating church-based programs for immigrant families with children can be viewed as primarily a children's ministry because the focus of the program is to provide spiritual and educational benefits to children.⁸⁶ Research also indicates that immigrant families view church-related programs for children as important for transmitting religious values from one generation to the next.⁸⁷ For immigrant parents concerned about the constant exposure of children to sinful behaviors common in American society, church-programs for children provide a venue in which children can learn positive behaviors consistent with Christian belief.

The elements of the program for immigrant families should be tailored to the specific needs of the target population in the community where the church is situated, such as providing childcare or preschool for immigrant families. The program elements that involve the entire family should also help parents be aware that they function as role models for the spiritual development of their children as well as development in learning and other areas.⁸⁸ An additional goal for church-based children's programs is to help immigrant children make positive adjustments to life in the US.⁸⁹ Adjusting to American society is important for future spiritual, academic, and social growth of immigrant children. Still, the children's ministry and related

⁸⁶ Ivy Beckwith, "Postmodern Children's Ministry. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), p. 49.

⁸⁷ Chen, *From Filial*, p. 578.

⁸⁸ Janice Haywood, *Enduring Connections: Creating a Preschool and Children's Ministry*. (Nashville, TN: Chalice Press, 2007), pp. 7-18.

⁸⁹ Joseph Tobin, et al., *Immigrant and Teacher Perspectives about Preschool*. (New York, NY: Russel Sage Foundation, 2013), p. 4.

programs must demonstrate to children that their home culture is valued at the same time they are learning how to adapt to the new cultural norms of the US.⁹⁰

A church-based program for immigrant families with children has an additional benefit of encouraging the parents to continue participating in religious practice despite the burdens of settling in a new country. The many tasks that immigrants must perform after coming to the US often creates the perception there is insufficient time to pray or attend church.⁹¹ A program incorporating prayer and Bible study into the support for childcare can increase the likelihood that Christian parents will remain closely involved with religious practice.

The literature indicates that churches and other faith-based organizations play an important role in providing support for immigrant families and particularly for families that cannot easily access government programs because of immigration status or lack of knowledge about available services. Undocumented immigrant families may have difficulty deciding for schooling for their children as well as healthcare because of concerns about possible deportation.⁹² Faith-based organizations can provide various types of assistance ranging from daycare programs to help with registering for healthcare programs and schools. The church-

⁹⁰ Rowena Fong, "Starting Over: Helping Immigrants and Refugees." *The Church Leader's Counseling Resource Book*, edited by Cynthia Franklin and Rowena Fong. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 316.

⁹¹ Massey and Higgins, *The Effects*, p. 1,385.

⁹² Mike Nicholson, "The Role of Faith Based Organizations in Immigrants Health and Entrepreneurship." *International Migration Policy Report* (2019), p. 89.

based setting for assistance programs engenders greater trust and willingness of immigrant parents to receive assistance for enrolling in governmental benefit programs.⁹³

Research by Helm, Berg, and Scranton documents the phenomena associated with preschool children experience of awe and reverence that lead them towards God.⁹⁴ Children are aware of spirituality at a very young age with education concerning religion providing a framework for preschool children to understand their thoughts about spirituality. The growth in spiritual interest continues throughout childhood and into adolescence. The introduction of concepts related to religious beliefs such as Bible teaching must be at an appropriate level for the child's development. Once children understand the connection between spirituality and religious teachings, they tend to apply the teachings spontaneously to their lives and experiences.

Another study shows that children in church-operated childcare, preschool, or after-school programs found that contemplative-reflective practices regardless of the age of the child created a positive perception of receiving support from peers and adults.⁹⁵ The concept of receiving support is related to a sense that someone is present to help or support the child, which can include a sense of the presence of God. The intent of the contemplative-reflective

⁹³ Hirokazu Yosikawa, et al., "Improving Access of Low-Income Immigrant Families to Health and Human Services." *Urban Institute* (204), p. 7. <https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/33576/2000011-Improving-Access-of-Low-Income-Immigrant-Families-to-Health-and-Human-Services.pdf>

⁹⁴ Judy Helm, et al., "Documenting Children's Spiritual Development in a Preschool Program." *Christian Education Journal*, 4, No. 2 (2007), p. 274.

⁹⁵ Robert Crosby, et al., "Practices of Supportive Church Children's Ministries: An Exploratory Multilevel Investigation of Church of the Nazarene Congregations in the United States." *Review of Religious Research*, 63 (2021), p. 384.

practices is to develop feelings of collective security and experience the awe and wonder of God, with the specific practice tailored to be appropriate for the age of the child.

An additional function of church-based children's programs noted in the literature is the development of English language skills for children in preschool and other grades for whom English is a second language. In a childcare and preschool context, English language acquisition usually involves some play-based activities to engage the child while learning the new language. An ESL program for children can also function as an outreach tool to attract immigrants and their families to the church, providing an opportunity to discuss Christian beliefs through the language instruction. On the other hand, a program emphasizing ESL requires church staff or volunteers that are both bilingual and familiar with educational methods necessary to teach language.⁹⁶ A children's language program is an initial step in establishing a multilingual church, which can be difficult because the pastor is responsible for encouraging members of the church to communicate in more than one language.

Spiritual Leadership and Christian Contentment in Times of Flux

The literature concerning spiritual leadership of a church during times of flux or tumultuous change often contains a discussion that centers on Philippians 4:11-13 in which Paul describes the contentment he achieved through his faith in Christ. Jeremy Burroughs, originally writing in 1648, remarks that the passage in Philippians was "to persuade the Philippians that he [Paul] did not seek after great things in the world...for whether I have or have not, my heart

⁹⁶ Marlene Schmidt, "Language Partners: The Church, Multiple Languages, and ESL." *International Journal of Christianity and Language Teaching*, 3 (2016), p. 48.

is fully satisfied, I have enough: ‘I have learned in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.’”⁹⁷

The discussion throughout the writing contains advice about ways that Christians can achieve and maintain contentment through Christ despite the temptations found in the pleasures of the world and the adverse circumstances undermining faith. Spiritual leadership includes inspiring members of a congregation to routinely engage in devotional prayer, Bible study, and accepting the will of God as the means to develop contentment through Christ.⁹⁸

The concept of contentment in English versions of the Bible refers to being satisfied or pleased with the idea of contentment often considered to be equivalent to happiness.⁹⁹ Contentment reflects a general sense of well-being. In the original Greek in which Paul writes, the word used for contentment was *autarkeia*, which has the meaning of satisfied, adequate, or sufficient.¹⁰⁰ Paul indicates that he was not competent to achieve happiness or contentment by his own devices but had learned to be content in all situations because of the knowledge that God’s grace was sufficient for contentment in any situation.

The term *autarkeia* was associated with the Stoic philosophy common at the time Paul wrote his letter to the Philippians, which has created significant controversy as to whether the term should be understood in the context of Stoic philosophy. The Stoics believed that the best

⁹⁷ Jeremy Burroughs, *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment*. (Pensacola, FL: Chapel Library, 1648/2001), p. 1.

⁹⁸ Neal Krause and R. David Hayward, “Prayer Beliefs and Changes in Life Satisfaction Over Time.” *Journal of Religion and Health*, 52, No. 2 (2013), p. 679.

⁹⁹ Charles Kelley, “The Miracle of Contentment,” *Discipleship Journal*, 42 (1986), p. 32.

¹⁰⁰ Patrick Gray, *Opening Paul’s Letters*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), p. 36.

way to deal with external problems was to abandon all worldly desires. To find happiness, the individual must strive to be self-sufficient and not dependent on external things.¹⁰¹ One side of the controversy suggests that Paul indeed was referring to Stoic ideas because he indicates that contentment through faith in Christ brings freedom and happiness, which is an idea not found in the Old Testament.¹⁰² The other side of the controversy argues that the contentment Paul wrote about is not to be confused with Stoic ideas because Christian contentment involves satisfaction with what God has provided rather than the idea of abandoning the world.¹⁰³ In Philippians 4, Paul meant the word *autarkeia* to be understood in the context of friendships at the time he was writing with satisfaction arise from the non-material aspects of life. Regardless of the meaning ascribed to the term, Paul means that faith in Christ was enough to bring contentment and happiness to Christians.

Paul possibly mentioned the concept of contentment to persuade the Philippians to persevere in their effort to follow Christ.¹⁰⁴ The Philippians may have been facing some type of adversity and required encouragement to maintain their strength through faith. Consequently, the passage concerning contentment is relevant to any Christian facing a difficult situation. In addition to an exhortation to Christians to rely on Christ, the letter to the Philippians is a call for practical application of the principles of Christianity to situations encountered in life, with a

¹⁰¹ Douglas Ezell, "The Sufficiency of Christ: Philippians 4." *Review and Expositor*, 77, No. 3 (1980), p. 379.

¹⁰² Abraham Maherbe, *Light from the Gentiles: Hellenistic Philosophy and Early Christianity*. (Leiden Netherlands: Brill, 2014), 325.

¹⁰³ Gerald Peterman. "Giving and Receiving Paul's Epistles." *Tyndale Bulletin*, 44, No. 1 (1993), p. 192.

¹⁰⁴ A.H. Snyman, "Philippians 4:10-23 From a Rhetorical Perspective." *Acta Theologica*, 27, No. 2 (2007), p. 169.

particular emphasis on being content or satisfied with the grace that God has given to the faithful.¹⁰⁵ Contentment means neither shunning nor seeking the material things of the world but rather a sense of peace from the knowledge that all things are part of God's plan.

In Philippians 4:12, Paul acknowledges that contentment through Christ regardless of the situation is a secret that Christians must learn. The statement implies that Christians do not automatically gain contentment at the time of baptism into the Christian faith.¹⁰⁶ Paul also suggests that he learned Christian contentment because of suffering in everyday life and placing his trust in God. An additional implication of the secret nature of contentment is that not all Christians have learned how to achieve contentment through Christ and may require guidance to help them become content despite adverse or discouraging circumstances in their lives. Christians who discover contentment are free from dependency on material things beyond what is necessary to meet their basic needs. From this perspective, the secret revealed by Paul in Philippians 4:10-14 is the futility of chasing after the things of the world to find the happiness that the things of the world cannot bring if people do not place their trust in God.¹⁰⁷

Liz Carter claims that the experience of contentment can take various types or forms depending on the situation.¹⁰⁸ Confident contentment involves the assurance that faith and identity as a Christian help bring peace to an individual's life, which is particularly relevant when facing adversity. Captivated contentment occurs with the feeling of serenity that comes from

¹⁰⁵ Ezell, *The Sufficiency*, p. 374.

¹⁰⁶ Andrew Davis, *The Power of Christian Contentment*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2019), p. 23.

¹⁰⁷ Rick Atchley, "I Have Learned the Secret," *Leaven* 5, No. 4 (1997), p. 15.

¹⁰⁸ Liz Carter, *Catching Contentment: How to be Holy Satisfied*. (London, United Kingdom: Intervarsity Press, 2018), p.8.

following God's plan for our lives. Contagious contentment is the sense of peace that develops from helping others learn about God and finding their own contentment through Christ. The various types of contentment suggest that developing contentment through Christ is part of a lifelong journey that gives people peace and serenity from the knowledge they are drawing closer to God.

Because contentment through Christ must be developed and does not occur automatically, some of the literature focuses on the advice that pastors can give to help others. The concept of contentment through Christ should be defined in a way that is easy to understand such as having the inner peace that comes from knowing that God is with a person regardless of circumstances.¹⁰⁹ Likewise, practical rules to guide decisions can help achieve contentment. One set of rules could focus on how a person determines the level of material goods representing enough and whether excesses in anything are necessary or desirable. Repeatedly making good choices when dealing with the external world can help Christians maintain their focus on the spiritual benefits from following Christ, which is the source of real happiness and contentment.

A potential tool to assist pastors when counseling congregants is the Christian Contentment Scale, which is a measure intended for adults of the experience of life satisfaction attributed to God. The scale has ten items with a 5-point Likert scale asking individuals to rate their level of agreement with various statements such as "My soul is content because of God's

¹⁰⁹ Kenneth Schnell, "When Enough is Enough." *Dynamic Steward* (April-June 2006), p. 8.

grace.”¹¹⁰ The scale has established reliability and validity and can be useful for assessing the position of an individual with respect to Christian contentment. The answers that Christians give to the items in the scale can help identify issues that may be barrier to experiencing contentment through Christ.

Church Organizational Leadership in Times of Flux

A strand of literature concerning church leadership considers the role of the leader in times of flux or change as blending organizational management approaches with biblical principles. The management of a church during a period of flux or social change is a particularly difficult area because of the differing perspectives of congregants concerning changes that must be made to some of the organizational and operating processes of the church.¹¹¹ At the same time, the pastor often must share decision-making authority with other church leaders, which can result in challenging conflicts concerning future directions.

Michael Foss recommended that the initial step for church leadership is to clearly articulate statements concerning the church’s mission, vision, and values, which is a typical undertaking for managing any organization.¹¹² The mission, vision, and values involve the biblical foundation for the church. The mission statement provides broad guidance about the

¹¹⁰ Joshua Knabb, Veola Vázquez, and Kenneth Wang, “The Christian Contentment Scale: An Emic Measure for Assessing Inner Satisfaction within the Christian Tradition.” *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, 49, No. 2 (2021), p. 336.

¹¹¹ Birgitt Riddersporre and Johanna Lundberg, “Church Reform and the Management of Meaning in Times of Change.” *Church Reform and Leadership of Change* edited by Harald Askerland. (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2016), p. 58.

¹¹² Michael Foss, *Reviving the Congregation: Pastoral Leadership in a Changing Context*. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2014), p. 8.

purpose of the church with respect to the congregation and how the church will help them know and serve God. The vision statement expresses the desired position of the church in the future, which operates as a goal behind church activities. The statement of values or principles explains how the Bible will guide the activities to implement the mission and achieve the vision. In the specific case of a preschool and other programs aimed at children of immigrants and their families the mission and vision will revolve around what should children know about God in preschool and elementary school and what will be the church's role in encouraging and equipping families to help their children learn.¹¹³

The literature concerning church leadership during periods of social, political, or economic change emphasizes the need for church leaders to adopt new strategies to support the needs of Christians in a changing environment. One approach to leadership is to change the organizational design of the church based on the needs of the congregants.¹¹⁴ The functional organization of the church is a human attribute that is separate from the spiritual purpose of a church because the organization influences how God's message is conveyed without affecting the core elements of biblical teachings. Other new strategies can include the development of new programs to support the congregation, which may require organizational changes.

Adopting a management approach may be necessary for pastors to implement ministry programs.¹¹⁵ The pastor or other church leader can use a clear planning process for ministry programs aimed at providing support for congregants or for outreach to new members. The

¹¹³ Haywood, *Enduring*, p. 7.

¹¹⁴ Kathleen Austin-Roberson, "Making Stronger, Better Churches through Organizational Design." *Journal of Strategic Leadership* 2, No. 1 (2009), p. 29.

¹¹⁵ Robert Welch, *Church Administration*, (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2011), pp. 331-334.

planning should ideally establish a program structure to facilitate operations. The planning for a program such as a preschool also requires establishing an organizational chart that clearly defines the responsibilities of the individuals responsible for various tasks for program operation as well as the schedule for task performance. The planning should ensure that staff is properly trained and that the necessary physical and financial resources are available for the program as well.

A leadership strategy based on the concept of identity-building could also be helpful during periods of social change.¹¹⁶ A pastor can increase the attractiveness of a church by shaping the social-religious identity of the congregation. Identity involves applying the message of Christianity of hope and salvation in a manner that is relevant to people in the changing social environment. The role of the pastor as leader is to assess the external environment of the church and to determine how best to apply the Word of God to issues that people face in the current social conditions. The approach implies that effective church leadership requires constant examination of the eternal and adjustments to areas such as church organization and program content to effectively communicate the Word of God.

Gap in the Literature

The existing research has investigated the concept of the AD and the need to encourage Christians to focus on spiritual relationship with God rather than the pursuit of material wealth. The literature has also established that biblical principles require Christians to accept and

¹¹⁶ Jack Berenson, "Church Leadership as Adaptive Identity Construction in a Changing Social Context." *Journal of Religious Leadership*, 14, No. 2 (2015), p. 53.

support immigrants as foreigners in a new land and the perspectives and behaviors of immigrants to the US towards religious practice. The needs of immigrant families with children have been well documented, which includes the attributes valued in childcare and preschool programs such as transmission of religious beliefs and values to the next generation. However, a gap in the literature is the lack of research concerning the effect of childcare programs operated by a church on the ability of parents to shift attention away from the pursuit of material wealth and to focus on developing contentment through Christ. There has not been research concerning the optimal approach to developing a church-operated comprehensive child and family support program for immigrants on the development of contentment through Christ.

Conclusion

The amount of literature that exists concerning the topics considered for this thesis-project is quite ample. The literature presented in this chapter was selected based on its relevance to the concepts under investigation and the reliability of the source. The attempt for deeper research into the AD, taking faith back from AD, Christian and American immigrants, immigrant families with children, church-based programs for immigrant children and families, spiritual leadership and Christian contentment in times of flux, church organizational leadership in times of flux, and gaps in the literature brought the preceding review of literature. Future studies and research on these topics might be able to introduce new angles and perspectives as they become available.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT DESIGN

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to develop the IFSP for Brazilian immigrants. This program provides services to help with caring for children while encouraging the parents to replace the pursuit of the materialistic AD with a focus on contentment through Christ. The following sections present a description of the data gathering method, a needs assessment for our specific congregation, and a description of the three components of the IFSP developed to assist immigrant families consisting of childcare, parental assistance in dealing with government and social service agencies, and spiritual counseling for families to emphasize developing contentment through Christ.

Methods

An action research approach was used to develop the childcare and the support and counseling components of the IFSP. Action research is intended to make significant changes to a social situation¹ such as the difficulties immigrants have with childcare, prompting excessive focus on achieving the AD. The methodology used is a systematic empirical approach to improve practice, which can include the practical application of Christian theology to individual

¹ Bramer, Paul and Mark Chapman, "Action Research for the Doctor of Ministry Project: A Practical Definition." *Journal of Christian Ministry*, 6, p. 32.

circumstances.² The development of the IFSP only involves the planning and acting phase of the action research cycle.

The empirical nature of the action research requires collecting data about the problem the change is intended to impact, with the data usually obtained through collaboration with participants who have experience with the problem.³ The data for preparing the IFSP was collected with a survey disseminated to 52 Brazilian immigrants who are part of GSAGF.

Participants of the Study

Several churches who serve the Brazilian community in the vicinity of Framingham, MA were invited to participate in this study. A number of meetings were set up to explain the project, the needs the researcher intended to address, and the value of the participation of the Brazilian community. Given the different locations and people involved and their changing work schedules, there was a need to set up more than one meeting in different locations. Group meetings were conducted as a breakfast meeting; the researcher had meetings at restaurants, and at a local mall.

To work with pastors of Brazilian congregations as they were also invited to take part of this study from the pastoral point of view, the author of this thesis-project scheduled appointments with the pastors to present the details of the project to them both as participants

² Helen Cameron, et al., *Talking About God in Practice: Theological Action Research and Practical Theology*. (London, UK: SCM Press, 2010), pp. 18-19.

³ Hillary Huang, "What Is Good Action Research?" *Action Research* 8, No. 1 (2010), p. 102.

from the pastoral standpoint and to help encourage members of the church to participate in this research.

The Questionnaires

The questionnaire for the Brazilian community (QBC) consisted of 26 statements asking participants to rate their level of agreement with the statement by using a 5-point a Likert scale for questions 1-26. Questions 17 to 26 were answered using a 4-point modified Likert scale. There were also four demographic questions included in the questionnaire. The complete questionnaire can be found on Appendix A. The questionnaire for pastors of Brazilian congregations (QPBC) consisted of 25 statements where participants had to indicate their level of agreement with the statement using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree, along with two demographic questions. The QPBC was administered to seven pastors who have immigrants in their congregations. The complete questionnaire can be found on Appendix B. Data related to the concerns of Brazilian immigrant families with children was also collected from interactions with individuals in our congregation.

The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics to provide information about average scores of participants as average scores on the modified-Likert scale and percentages for the demographic questions. Descriptive statistics summarize raw data to facilitate easier understanding.⁴ The researcher also obtained information about the viewpoints and problems encountered by Brazilian immigrants from our routine conversations with congregants. The

⁴ Parampreet Kaur, et al., "Descriptive statistics." *International Journal of Academic Medicine*, 4 (2018), p. 60.

information from the surveys and congregant conversations was analyzed to support the development of a three-part IFSP consisting of the children's program, assistance to parents with obtaining school registration and health care for children, and spiritual counseling to help immigrant families strive towards achieving contentment through Christ.

Questionnaire for the Brazilian Community

Fifty-two congregants completed the QBC, all of whom were born in Brazil. Some participants did not complete all the questions on the survey. The main reasons for the skipped questions include difficulty expressing themselves in the English language and the fear factor that is very much present in their minds as being undocumented immigrants, even though the QBC answers would remain anonymous. Twenty-four of the congregant participants were male while 28 were female. The age of the participants was varied, with the majority being between the ages of 35 and 44. Figure 1 shows the age distribution of the congregant participants.

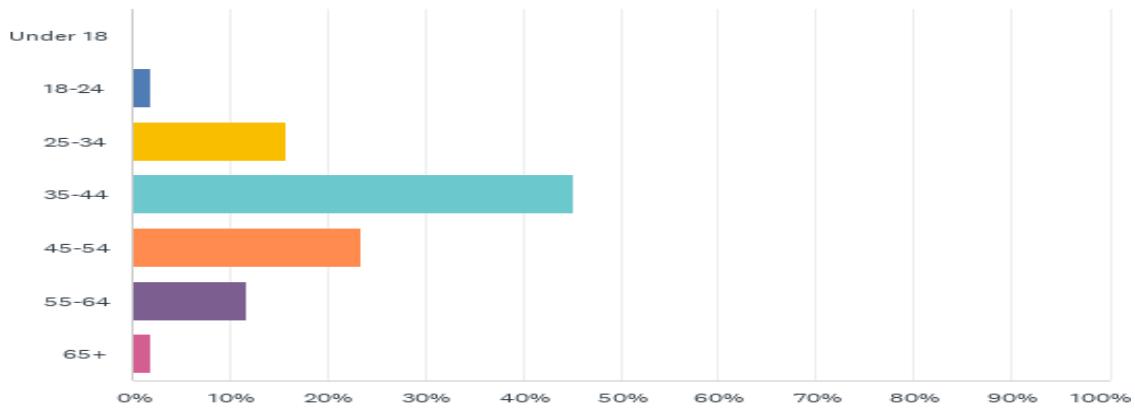


Figure 1. Age of the Congregant Participants

The demographic data from the QBC also indicated that the majority indicated they immigrated to the US more than 10 years ago. Figure 2 shows the number of years since the participants immigrated to the US.

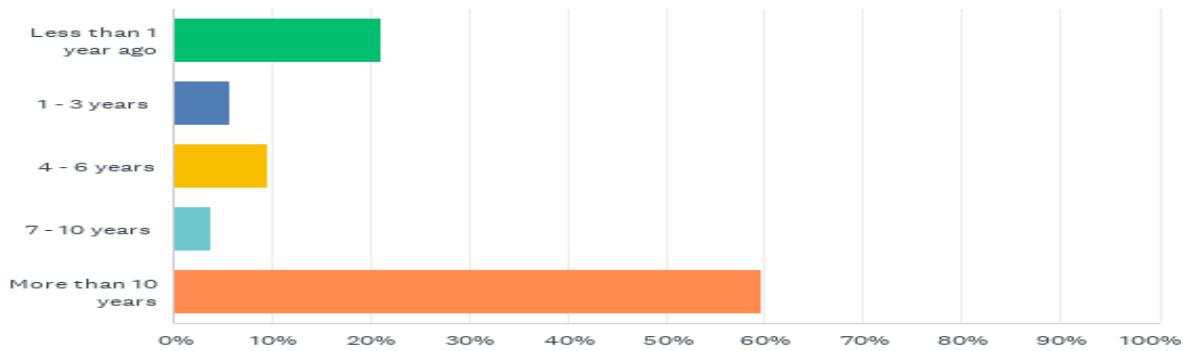


Figure 2. Years Since Immigration of the Congregant Participants

Analysis of Questionnaire for the Brazilian Community

The analysis of the data from the GBC and our discussions with immigrant families identified the needs of the Brazilian immigrants in the congregation to be addressed by the IFSP. The analysis of the data from the QBC provided information about the attitude toward the AD and adjustment to life in the US. All the results are shown on graphs and tables found on Appendix C.

In response to question 1, 72% of the respondents responded they agreed or strongly agreed there was little economic opportunity in Brazil. The responses to question 2 indicated that 39 of the participants agreed or strongly agreed that all members of the family had to work in Brazil for the family to survive. The responses to questions 4 through 8 indicated agreement with statements related to the promise of the AD of a materially better life as the motivator to

leave Brazil. On question 4, a total of 39 of the participants agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that they believed they could achieve economic prosperity in the US.

In the responses to question 5, a total of 37 participants agreed or strongly agreed it would not take long to achieve prosperity once in the US. Question 6 asked about beliefs that the children of participants would have more opportunities in the US with 45 participants agreeing or strongly agreeing as shown in Table 5.

The responses to the questions in the first part of the QBC suggested that the participants had economic motives for coming to the US and believed that they could rapidly achieve financial prosperity because of immigration. The responses also suggested that the participants had expectations that they would achieve the financial prosperity attracting them to the US and they would find greater opportunities for children.

Question 9 concerning whether the expectations before leaving Brazil now seem unrealistic and question 10 regarding expectations of adjustment to American culture drew mixed responses with half of the participants considering the expectations unrealistic. The responses to question 9 asking whether expectations of prosperity seem unrealistic show 21 participants either strongly disagreeing or disagreeing, while 24 participants either agreed or strongly agreed.

In response to question 10 concerning whether expectations of adjustment to American culture were unrealistic, 24 participants strongly disagreed or disagreed while 17 participants agreed or strongly agreed. Some participants have experienced frustration in their expectations for prosperity and cultural adjustment since immigrating, However, they agree that they were financially better off in the US with answers to question 11. Fourty-four of the respondents

agreed or strongly agreed they were financially better off in the US than in Brazil. The results from this question suggest the participants realized some of the economic benefits that motivated the immigration.

The responses to questions 17 to 26 concerning mental health after immigrating indicated the participants had adjusted well to life in the US. This points forward that the Brazilian members of the congregation may be focused on obtaining prosperity and material benefits from living in the US, which could suggest they do not currently emphasize on becoming content through their faith in Christ.

Questionnaire for Pastors of Brazilian Congregations

The QPBC was distributed to seven pastors. It provided general information about the perceptions of the needs of Brazilian congregants under their pastoral care. All the results are shown on graphs and tables found on Appendix D. Among the six pastors providing demographic data, three have been pastors for more than 15 years. Five of the six pastors providing demographic data pastors have worked with Brazilian immigrants for more than five years.

The pastors were generally positive in their abilities to minister to a Brazilian immigrant congregation. With respect to the question 2 concerning the perception among the pastors that they had sufficient training and experience to minister to immigrant community, three of the pastors neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement. Despite the lack of training and experience, six of the seven pastors answering question 3 agreed or strongly agreed they were comfortable providing pastoral care to an immigrant.

This lack of training often comes from the many occupations and responsibilities the pastors have. They have a heart open to immigrants, yet they often need to focus on preaching and might not have the time to offer individual counseling. On the other hand, Brazilian immigrants tend to be shy in asking for help or counseling. The pastors must find a way to encourage them to ask for help when needed.

The pastors also noted that Brazilian members of their congregation attend services regularly with four of the seven pastors answering question 6 agreeing or strongly agreeing. Among the pastors answering question 7, five agreed that Brazilian members of their congregations regularly sought spiritual guidance, which creates an opportunity to discuss contentment through Christ as well as other spiritual matters with immigrant congregants.

The data from the QPBC also indicated that pastors provide practical advice concerning adjustment to life in the US. For example, question 9 asked whether pastors help Brazilian members of their congregations by providing practical counseling about obtaining education, which contributes to financial security and adjustment to life in the US.

The results of the QPBC support the fact that pastors provide spiritual advice to immigrants in their congregation as well as advice for achieving secular goals such as education. Counseling creates an opportunity to help congregants gain an understanding of the importance of contentment through Christ for their life in the US. The data further suggests that pastors could benefit from additional training in dealing with the issues of immigrant communities.

Qualitative Data

From the conversations with congregants, the researcher gathered ur that the need for childcare to allow parents to work is a significant concern in the Brazilian immigrant community. Many of the parents with children under the age of five cannot afford formal childcare or preschool programs and often leave their children in the care of a family member or neighbor. Some families also have unusual work schedules to ensure one parent is at home to care for young children. Likewise, affordability of childcare services is an issue with the majority of the families in the congregation earning approximately \$40,000, which for some larger families is below the state median household income of \$89,000.⁵ The problem of childcare lays in that late afternoon and early evening are particularly difficult times for parents with children in elementary and middle school because the children are older and require age-appropriate activities to hold their interest. Many of the congregants do not have a good understanding of the various benefits available through schools and from the government for low-income families, with some parents being concerned about their immigration status when interacting with schools and government agencies.

Conclusion

The researcher anticipates that modifications may be necessary once implementation of the IFSP begins because of unforeseen difficulties. The difficulties are most likely to arise with the childcare component of the program because of the need to organize funding and

⁵ U.S Census Bureau, “Quick Facts, Massachusetts,” 2021.
<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/MA/INC110221>

personnel, which may cause delays. However, the assistance for immigrant parents with government agencies and the spiritual counseling components of the IFSP can be implemented immediately.

CHAPTER 5

OUTCOMES AND CONCLUSION

Introduction

The purpose of this action research study was to create a church-based family support program for immigrants, the IFSP, to address practical problems related to childcare and to help families abandon pursuing the AD in favor of striving toward contentment through Christ. Developing contentment through Christ can help immigrant families accept their current situation by trusting in God. Recognizing the harmful materialism that is part of the AD can also assist them with maintaining their focus on following the Word of God that will result in happiness. The following subsections contain a summary of the study and a discussion of the learning that has occurred as well as reflection on possible directions for future research and learning.

Summary of Project

The problem addressed by this study was the emphasis many of the Brazilian members of GSAGF place on pursuit of the materialism associated with the AD rather than contentment through Christ developed from relying on the Word of God. Immigrants can become frustrated by the difficulties they encounter with achieving the prosperity they expected in the US before leaving their home country, which is an expectation fostered by the myth of the AD. To address the problem, the researcher relied on an action research methodology to develop the IFSP that consisted of childcare, assistance to families for interacting with government agencies and

schools, and a spiritual counseling program to encourage contentment through Christ using a seminar, family Bible study, and devotional worship.

The Bible provides guidance on the duty of Christians to welcome strangers and foreigners into a new land, with strangers and foreigners analogous to immigrants that are newcomers to a community.¹ An example from the Bible is the help Abraham provided to strangers who he saw while he was sitting beneath a tree.² The Bible also tells us to develop contentment through Christ, which is the knowledge that God has given us all we need with faith in Christ supporting us regardless of the situation.³ The pursuit of worldly goods, however, functions as barrier to developing contentment through Christ because it replaces love of God with materialism.⁴ Consequently, pursuit of the materialistic aspects of the AD is contrary to the Word of God.

Discussion of the Questionnaire Results

The QBC findings showed that the participants had expectations of a more prosperous life in the US with the expectation partially achieved. The participants also continued to believe that living in the US offered greater opportunity for their children. An implication of the findings for Brazilian congregants is that they are likely to take advantage of programs providing childcare and learning opportunities. Both the QBC and the QPBC suggested that the Brazilian

¹ Jennifer Lee Koh, “Agape, Grace, and Immigration: An Evangelical Perspective.” *Agape, Justice, and Law* edited by Robert Cochran and Zachary Calo (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2017), p. 38.

² Gen 18:1-8.

³ Phil 4:11-13.

⁴ Matt 6:19-21.

immigrants continued to have a strong connection to their faith, participated in church services, and sought both secular and spiritual counseling from pastors. An implication of the findings for a pastor is that the relationship with pastors creates an opportunity to emphasize the importance of developing contentment through Christ in the immigrant population. The findings are also consistent with some of the literature concerned with the need to draw Christians back to Bible teachings if they become engrossed with the pursuit of the AD.⁵

The findings of the QBC inform the research question concerning the development of the IFSP by underscoring the importance of ensuring that children have every opportunity for learning and spiritual development. The participants had an expectation that the church would help them adjust to life in the US, which includes the childcare need to help parents work and developing a spiritual focus to minimize the importance of pursuing wealth and material goods. Hence, Brazilian immigrants are likely to value an IFSP that includes assistance with childcare while helping families grow spiritually.

Discussion of the Immigrant Families Support Program

The childcare component of the IFSP is intended to allow parents to work while assured that their children are safely cared for in a Christian environment. The GSAGF will provide free childcare to immigrant parents consisting of daycare, preschool, and after-school care that is open to immigrant families in the congregation. The daycare will involve children ages 24 to 36

⁵ Adrian Mack, *God Bless America: The Discourse Between the American Dream and Christianity*. (Bloomington, IN: Author House, 2013), p. 16; David Platt, *Radical: Taking Back Your Faith from the American Dream*. (Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah Publishing, 2010), p. 13; Lisa Surdyk, "God's Economy: Teaching Students Key Biblical Principles." *The Journal of Bible Integration in Business*, 8, No. 1 (2002), p.74.

months, the preschool will involve children 3 to 5 years, and the after-school program is for children in elementary and middle school. Parents will be expected to apply for childcare vouchers from the state of MA but will not be charged for childcare if the vouchers are not available. The program will have two salaried teachers and rely on volunteers from the church to aid the teachers. The childcare will emphasize age-appropriate Bible instruction to promote growth in language skills and preparation for school. The childcare component of the program has a budget that depends on grants, childcare vouchers, and church funds to meet costs of implementing the childcare services and to meet ongoing expenses.

The PA component of the IFSP will provide participants with information about government assistance options and schools and help with registering for government and school programs. Many immigrant families have difficulty understanding the complex government and school programs for which they may be eligible.⁶ This component is intended to reduce stress for families by increasing access to government and school programs. Improving family access to safety-net programs can reduce the focus on pursuing materialistic goals. The PA component of the IFSP will be operated with volunteers possessing knowledge or experience about public assistance and education options.

The volunteer component of the IFSP will rely on people who have a heart for helping other immigrants. Brazilian immigrants who have been in the US for over five years and understand what the newcomers face would be a valuable resource to help in this program.

⁶ Harald Bernstein, et al., "Amid Confusion in the Public Charge Rule, Immigrant Families Continued Avoiding Public Benefits in 2019." Urban Institute, 2020, p. 2.
https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/102221/amid-confusion-over-the-public-charge-rule-immigrant-families-continued-avoiding-public-benefits-in-2019_1.pdf

The spiritual counseling is the most significant component of the IFSP. It is intended to help families reject the materialism associated with the AD in favor of striving for contentment through Christ. The spiritual counseling will involve a three-hour two-session seminar questioning the validity of the AD and explaining contentment through Christ, weekly family Bible study, and daily family prayer and devotional practice. The first session of the seminar is a discussion about the way the AD is incongruous with Bible teachings and how the pursuit of materialism brings unhappiness. The second session of the seminar contains information about contentment through Christ as described in the Bible and a discussion of practical ideas of how participants can work towards becoming content through Christ in their lives. The Bible study will focus on the various passages of the Bible describing contentment through Christ and the need to avoid the pursuit of material goods to achieve salvation. The prayer and devotional worship component will focus on encouraging participants in the program to spend part of each day in prayer and contemplation of contentment through Christ.

Components of the Immigrants Family Support Program

Children Care

The children care component of the IFSP consists of the daycare, preschool and after school conducted at the GSAGF described in detail in the following business plan. The plan for the childcare is based on the assumption that the daycare and preschool will have 15 children and the supervised after-school activities will have an additional 20 children with participation limited to families that are congregants of the church. The materials for preparing the business plan are drawn from the needs assessment and the daycare and preschool programs operated

by other Christian organizations. The daycare, preschool, and after school components of the program will each have a Bible school activity each day that is appropriate for the age group and focused on helping the children understand how God plays a role in their lives.

The operation of the childcare component of the program is based on the mission of actively nurturing and encouraging learning among children and to help their families to grow in their relationship with Christ. The vision of the childcare component is to provide Bible-based child development for all the children of the Brazilian immigrant families of GSAGF. The childcare component of the program will be organized as a nonprofit that is part of GSAGF.

The childcare component of the IFSP will use the GSAGF property with the church directly employing the two teachers and solicit volunteer staff from the congregation, which follows the pattern used by many church operated daycare and preschool programs.⁷ All services will have a nominal charge waived for the children of immigrant families with the church funds, grants, and childcare subsidies available to eligible parents defraying the expenses of program operation. The state of MA offers an early education and childcare (EEC) credit to low-income families that can be applied to the cost of childcare.⁸ The nominal charge for childcare is necessary to obtain the EEC credit.

The daycare will accept Brazilian immigrant members of the congregation between the ages of 24 and 36 months. These children will be cared for separately from other age groups. The daycare will operate Monday thru Friday between the hours of 7 AM and 5 PM in the

⁷ Bipartisan Policy Center, "Examining the Role of Faith Based Childcare." May 2021: p. 5.
https://bipartisanpolicy.org/download/?file=/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/ECI-Faith-Based-Brief_RV2-1-1.pdf.

⁸ Jeff Gross and Christine Ntagenwa, "Challenges in Accessing Early Childhood Education and Care for Refugee Families in Massachusetts," Migration Policy Institute, 2016, p. 1.
<https://www.immigrationresearch.org/system/files/FCD-Gross-FINAL.pdf>

GSAGF building. A teacher with education and experience with EEC experience and at least one volunteer assistant will rely on a learning curriculum for young children with particular emphasis on English language development. The curriculum in both the daycare and preschool will use a Bible-based language development approach that incorporates Bible-themed picture books and videos and informal discussions of the content.⁹ The maximum children to staff ratio is eight to one, which is based on American Public Health Association guidelines for children's daycare centers.¹⁰

The preschool will welcome children of Brazilian immigrant parents between the ages of three and five. The preschool will also operate between the hours of 7 AM and 5 PM in the GSAGF building in a room separate from the younger children. The preschool teacher will have EEC experience, a volunteer assistant, and will use a curriculum intended to develop readiness of children for school and the development of English language proficiency. The staffing ratio will be similar to the daycare component of the program with eight children to one teacher or volunteer.

The afterschool childcare will be available for elementary and middle school children between 2:30 PM and 5 PM. The preschool will be staffed by a volunteer for the elementary students and a volunteer for the middle school students. A requirement for the staff is to be bilingual in Brazilian Portuguese and English to promote English language learning among the children. The language requirement for teachers is based on research indicating immigrant

⁹ Min-Jung Kim, "The Change of Christian Preschool Teachers Through Development of Bible-Based Early Childhood Language Education Activities." *Journal of Christian Education in Korea*, 61 (2020), p. 169.

¹⁰ Sandra Hong, et al., "ECE Quality Indicators and Child Outcomes: Analysis of Six Large Childcare Studies." *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 46 (2019), p. 207.

children benefit from bilingual teachers who are able to affirm the child's identity in both the home and host country culture and language.¹¹ The after-school childcare of the program will offer students an array of age appropriate activities in the area of Bible studies, mathematics, and reading, which is an approach demonstrated as effective for improving school performance of elementary and middle school students.¹² The staffing ratio will be ten children to one volunteer.

The preschool teacher will operate as director of the childcare component of the IFSP and report to the pastor of GSAGF. Under MA law, church-operated daycare and preschool programs are not exempt from licensure if they provide services other than childcare for religious instruction. The pastor will assist the program director with meeting the requirements for state licensure of the program, which is also a prerequisite for grant funding and for parents to obtain EEC vouchers from the state.

Other church-operated daycare centers and preschools have an advisory council with experience in EEC.¹³ The pastor will work in conjunction with the director of children care to prepare a policy and operating manual for parents and volunteers and assist in training volunteers. The objective is to create consistency in the delivery of spiritual and educational services to the children in the program. The director of childcare services together with the

¹¹ Nola Harvey and Htwe Myint, "Language Is Like Food: Can Children Feed on Home Languages to Thrive, Belong, and Achieve in Early Childhood Education and Care?" *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*, 39, No. 2 (2014), p. 44.

¹² Kim Pierce, et al., "Specific Features of After-School Program Quality: Associations of Children Functioning in Middle School." *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 45 (2010), p. 85.

¹³ Early Learning Consulting Services, "Little Friends of Living Faith Business Plan." 2019. <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5d5474bfe758e100016f9f3a/t/608046cbcd454c1de3cb7aef/1619019482390/CLIVE+Little+Friends+Business+Plan-FINAL+%281%29.pdf>

pastor will be responsible for encouraging parents who are not working, other family members, and retired members of the church to volunteer for providing care for children. The use of volunteers creates unpredictability in staffing, which can be addressed by scheduling an additional volunteer each day above the minimum number of staff necessary to maintain child to teacher ratios. The model for the daycare and preschool is to adopt systems and practices that draw families into participating with their children in various activities when parents are available.¹⁴ Consequently, parents are expected to volunteer to participate in the daycare, preschool, and after-school activities whenever possible. The lead teachers of the daycare and preschool components of the childcare services must be prepared to deal with unexpected contingencies from insufficient volunteers to maintain the desired staff levels.¹⁵

The funding for the operation of the childcare component of the IFSP at GSAGF will come from grants, contributions by church members, and childcare subsidies provided by the government to low-income parents from the state of MA. The pastor will apply for various grants available to fund the start daycare and preschool components of the IFSP. Appendix E shows some potential sources of grant funding. The state of MA provides means-tested childcare vouchers to low-income parents allowing the parents to select the childcare or preschool facility. The amount of the voucher is not higher than the lowest cost provider in the

¹⁴ Trinity Oaks Child Development Center, “Trinity Oaks Child Development Center Business Plan.” 2018. https://assets.speakcdn.com/assets/1825/trinity_oaks_business_plan_-_5-2-161.pdf

¹⁵ Deborah Kapp, “I’ll Think of Something: Improvisation in Small Church Service Programs.” *Review of Religious Research*, 54, No. 2 (2011), p. 205.

state.¹⁶ While the parents sending their children to the daycare or preschool facility operated by the church will be encouraged to apply for state childcare vouchers, there will be no additional charges to the families for childcare.

The anticipated budget for the startup of the childcare activities relies on the assumption that the GSAGF will provide operating space with the overhead absorbed as part of church operational costs and not allocated to childcare operations. The startup costs will be met by grants and church funds. The budget also considers that the teacher acting as director will be employed for a period of six months prior to taking children into daycare or preschool, which is necessary to prepare the church facility and to obtain necessary licensure.

Parental Assistance

The parental assistance (PA) component of the IFSP at GSAGF will provide information as well as help with filling out applications for various government benefits and with interfacing with the school system. The objective of PA is to reduce stress for families by obtaining services that can improve the ability of the families to provide care for children, thereby improving their ability to minimize the importance of pursuing wealth. The focus of PA is to help the family obtain optimal benefits from government and other sources to contribute to the child's spiritual, educational, and health needs.

Many immigrants and particularly undocumented immigrants hesitate to interact with government agencies to apply for benefits because of the possibility of government

¹⁶ Samantha Aigner-Treworgy, "Financial Assistance Policy Guide." Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care, February 2022, p. 29. <https://www.mass.gov/doc/eecs-financial-assistance-policy-guide-february-1-2022/download>

immigration interventions.¹⁷ The PA is to provide guidance concerning the types of programs available and how applying for assistance and interacting with the school could affect their immigration status. A particularly important aspect of the PA will be informing parents in GSAGF that the Public Charge Rule (PCR) concerning immigrants does not consider childcare subsidies or children's health care benefits when considering eligibility for permanent residency referred to as green card status. The PCR requires the federal government to consider whether an immigrant applicant for permanent residency has used public benefits when determining eligibility.¹⁸ Families can apply for various benefits for children such as EEC vouchers or Women, Infant, and Children (WIC) benefits without jeopardizing their eligibility for permanent residency in the US.

The pastor will be responsible for the operation of the PA component of the IFSP and will rely on volunteers from the congregation who have knowledge or experience with various government agencies and the schools providing additional support. Volunteers providing PA will include members of the congregation who are teachers and individuals with experience in obtaining government benefits. The specific type of assistance will be based on the needs of the family with children receiving childcare through the church. It is anticipated that providing PA will have no cost to the church.

¹⁷ Donald Kerwin and Mike Nicholson, "The Effects of Immigration Enforcement on Faith-Based Organizations: An Analysis of the FEER Survey." *Journal of Migration and Human Security*. 7, No. 2 (2019), p. 48.

¹⁸ Harald Bernstein, et al., "Amid Confusion in the Public Charge Rule, Immigrant Families Continued Avoiding Public Benefits in 2019." Urban Institute, 2020, p. 7.
https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/102221/amid-confusion-over-the-public-charge-rule-immigrant-families-continued-avoiding-public-benefits-in-2019_1.pdf

Spiritual Counseling for Families

The spiritual counseling is the most important component of the IFSP because it is intended to help parents gain an understanding of the importance of contentment through Christ as a replacement for the materialistic philosophy of the AD. Spiritual counseling focuses on helping individuals to grow and mature spiritually and to help others lead a more spiritual life.¹⁹ The data from the QBC and the QPBC provides insight concerning the necessary parts of the spiritual counseling for families. The spiritual counseling will have three elements, consisting of a two-session, three-hour seminar discussing the concept of the AD and introducing contentment through Christ, weekly Bible study sessions focusing on how to apply contentment through Christ as manifested in the Word of God to daily situations, and daily family prayer and devotional sessions to improve understanding of how to strive towards achieving contentment through Christ. The spiritual counseling as well as the prayer and Bible study sessions have the additional benefit of helping Christian parents remain closely involved with practicing their faith despite the difficulties with settling in the US.

The seminar is required for the parents of children receiving services in the IFSP and open to other members of the congregation and the community who are concerned with the conflict between the AD and the Word of God. The objective of the seminar is to help Brazilian immigrants as well as other immigrant populations understand how contentment through Christ can assist with adjusting to life in the US. The seminar will include a written participant evaluation of the presentation that shall provide useful information to improve the content of

¹⁹ Rodger Bufford, "Consecrated Counseling: Reflections on the Distinctiveness of Christian Counseling." *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, 25, No. 1 (1997), p. 112.

the seminar for use with future audiences. The content of the seminar will foster reexamination of the AD among participants and encourage participants to take steps to replace their effort to achieve the AD with effort to gain contentment through Christ. The complete content, topics and timeframe of the proposed seminars can be found on Appendix F.

The first session of the seminar will include a discussion of the AD based on the assumption that the expectation of material benefits motivated many of the people participating in the seminar to come to the US. The first session will also briefly discuss the incongruity of the concept of the AD with biblical teachings and the Christian way of life. The discussion will center on how the quest for a better life through material acquisition that drove many people to come to the US is a barrier to achieving happiness because materialism leads people to focus on their external situation. The first session will challenge the validity of the AD and the harm caused to individuals and families by striving for material goods or wealth. Activities for the participants will involve clarifying their understanding of the reasons they came to the US and questions concerning how well the AD is working for them. The goal of the first session will be for the members of the audience to understand how materialism is destructive for individuals and families, does not bring happiness, and is contrary to the Word of God. Ideally, the seminar attendees will begin to probe their attitudes and behaviors towards the acquisition of material goods and what the concept of a better life means to them.

The second session of the seminar will call for a discussion of the concept of contentment through Christ based on various Bible passages, and how to work towards achieving contentment with prayer, Bible study, and devotional worship. The second session of the seminar will be intended to provide information about the way in which striving for

Christian contentment can help Brazilian immigrants in the congregation and community use a Christian perspective to deal with various obstacles they encounter in their lives. The seminar will focus particularly on Philippians 4:11-13, although other Bible passages relevant to materialism and contentment through Christ will be discussed during the second session. The activities in the second session will assist participants with developing practical approaches to cultivate contentment through Christ in their lives, including the rejection of behaviors based on materialism and self-gratification. At the conclusion, the participants in the seminar will be invited to make appointments with the pastor for private spiritual counseling sessions.

The pastor will act as the leader of the seminars in both sessions and will be responsible for ensuring all the participants contribute to the discussion. Seminars involve open discussion and exchange of ideas among participants. Nonetheless, the understanding that some people are reluctant to contribute to public discussions is necessary for effectively engaging all participants in a seminar.²⁰ In addition, neutrality towards the ideas and perspectives of the participants towards the AD will be maintained to avoid confrontation or disagreements. The objective of the seminar shall focus on gently drawing the participants towards rejecting materialism and accepting that striving for contentment through Christ as a viable alternative to the AD. Therefore, avoiding criticism of their ideas or their current efforts to achieve prosperity is necessary to prevent defensive reactions. Additionally, the leader of the seminar will intervene to prevent disputes or conflicts arising among the participants in the seminar.

²⁰ Robert Jolles, *Seminars and Workshops: Presentation Skills for Consultants*. (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2017), p. 60.

The Bible study will be a separate element of the spiritual counseling component of the IFSP that will focus on the passages of the Bible relevant to contentment through Christ and the conflict between materialism and the love of God. The adults from the families participating in the IFSP ought to meet weekly in small groups to discuss relevant passages from the Bible. The children from the families will also meet in Sunday School for age-appropriate learning about the Bible while their parents are in adult Bible study sessions. The pastor will ask each of the adults in the weekly Bible study to have a private counseling session at least once a month in which issues related to leading a Christ-centered life in the context of their lives as immigrants in American society can be discussed. At the conclusion of the seminar, participants will be invited to arrange for private counseling sessions to discuss contentment through Christ or any other concerns.

The devotional worship element of spiritual counseling will encourage members of the families participating in the program to spend time each day reading and contemplating Scripture. Both Bible study and devotional worship are cornerstones of discipleship.²¹ To draw the families towards the idea of contentment through Christ as a replacement for the AD, each week participants will receive recommendations for Bible verses related to the topic of contentment and the harm caused by the pursuit of wealth. The recommendations are in addition to any other devotional resources the participants are using to guide their prayer and private worship.

²¹ Jack Jones, “Best Practices for Transformational Discipleship in North Dakota Assembly of God Churches.” (Ph.D. Dissertation, Bethel University, 2021), p. 67.

Learning That Has Occurred

A learning outcome from the research project was gaining an understanding of how the techniques of action research can be helpful for developing practical programs to bring the Word of God into people's lives. Action research involves the use of various research techniques such as formal data collection for project planning and analysis of effectiveness of a program to address a practical problem in society. An action research approach can identify approaches to discussing the Bible in a way that is relevant in the modern cultural context in which many people reject religious belief.²² By grounding the action research process in the Bible, the solutions to practical problems developed through the procedure can conform to the Word of God.²³ Therefore, it is possible to use a systematic approach to identifying the needs of a group of Christians, to design a program to meet those needs, and to evaluate the outcome of the program as the basis for making improvements.

In this study, the needs assessment was based on surveys and discussions with Brazilian immigrants in the congregation, which was part of the action research planning process. The information was the basis for designing the IFSP in the church that is intended to meet the childcare needs of the family while encouraging them to adopt contentment through Christ as an alternative to the pursuit of the AD. The implementation of the project will provide information about the effectiveness of the program and to determine if changes should be made in the content of the IFSP or the way it is implemented. Using the action research

²² Helen Cameron, et al., *Talking About God in Practice: Theological Action Research and Practical Theology*. (London, UK: SCM Press, 2010), p. 16.

²³ Elaine Graham, "Is Practical Theology a Form of Action Research?" *International Journal of Practical Theology* 17, No. 1 (2013), p. 159.

methodology, the collection of additional information will provide information necessary to determine if changes should be made in the program to increase its effectiveness for encouraging contentment through Christ among the participants.

An important learning outcome was gaining knowledge of the use of survey instruments to collect data from congregants and other pastors about issues relevant to Brazilian immigrants. Surveys conducted by churches and ministers have successfully provided information to guide the development of church-based programs to assist immigrants.²⁴ The survey method promotes anonymity for respondents that allows them to express opinions they may otherwise be reluctant to offer to a pastor. Surveys can also be important for providing information about the needs and perspectives of congregants to enable a pastor to emphasize the passages of the Bible having the greatest relevance for the situation of others. At the same time, the researcher learned about the limitations of using surveys for generating new ideas because the survey contains only pre-existing questions. To compensate for the limitations of surveys, the researcher also used information in the study from the discussions with congregants about their needs and concerns. While surveys deliver broad information about problems faced by members of a congregation and the effectiveness of a ministry, personal discussions with congregants provide detailed information about the specific needs of individuals. Nonetheless, the knowledge about developing and using survey can be helpful for other areas in which biblical concepts can be translated into practical approaches to assist people with drawing closer to God.

²⁴ Rich Janzen, et al., "Integrating Immigrants into the Life of Canadian Urban Christian Congregations: Findings from a National Survey." *Review of Religious Research*, 53 (2012), p. 443.

The participants expressed that they were not suffering from widespread mental health problems because of the conditions they faced in the US. A possible factor supporting the adjustment of the Brazilian immigrants to life in the US revealed by the survey is their reliance on the church for support. The implication of the survey findings is that faith in God, bolstered by participation in a church and following the Word of God, buffers some of the negative effects of the materialism found in the AD. Thus, the socially constructed religious environment created by the church fosters a personal identity based on Scripture.²⁵ The Christian identity functions as an alternative to the AD advocated by mainstream culture.

Another learning outcome from the project was insight into the complexity of creating church-based programs. The process of planning the IFSP was linear in nature and created a blueprint to coordinate the numerous elements necessary to implement the components of the program. The approach relied on a rational planning model that uses the assumption that resources organized to implement an intervention strategy to improve the lives and support the faith of congregants will have measurable results.²⁶ In this study, the intervention strategy is a childcare and spiritual counseling program with the intended result of increasing the focus of Brazilian immigrants on being content through Christ rather than striving to realize the AD. Because of the complexity of the program, it is likely the implementation process will have to be flexible to deal with unforeseen contingencies. The way in which the IFSP is implemented could vary from the ideal established in the planning phase.

²⁵ Xia Chao and Aaron Kuntz, "Church-Based ESL Programs as a Figured World: Immigrant Adult Learners, language, Identity, Power." *Linguistics and Education*, 24, No. 4 (2013), p. 468.

²⁶ Jon Singletary, "The Emergent Journey of Church-Based Program Planning." *Social Work and Christianity* 36, No. 2 (2009), p. 196.

Validation of the Hypothesis

The hypothesis enunciated in Chapter 1 of this thesis-project sustained that, by developing and implementing a program that supports immigrant families, and single persons as well, in which parents get help in the much-needed areas of childcare, identifying and applying for health care services and educational aids combined with a strong emphasis for all people on finding contentment in Christ as they navigate the new and unexpected challenges of life in a new country, immigrants would have a better quality of life and help to raise their children holding on to the faith that they brought from their homeland. The formulation of this hypothesis leaded us to the action question: How can a church develop a family support plan to assist immigrant families and singles with developing content through Christ?

The author of this thesis-project can attest to the veracity of this hypothesis for several reasons. The questionnaires were needed as a starting point for the discovery of the problem. They were intended to understand how the immigrants were dealing with all the unknown surprises upon arriving in the US. The understanding of the high demand of divorce among the immigrants and the difficulties that children and young people are facing with the language and the interaction with American people helped us develop a program to assist the needs of the immigrant family, coming to a conclusion that a daycare would be an important resource for the entire family in helping to bring them closer to God.

Future Research

The current study established the IFSP for existing congregants at GSAGF. Future research should investigate the use of childcare programs operated by a church as an outreach approach for immigrants that are not members of a congregation and may not be Christian. Most immigrant families strive towards achieving the AD and are often unsuccessful. All immigrant families also face similar problems with obtaining childcare to allow parents to work. While churches have operated childcare centers and use them for outreach, there is relatively little research concerning the effectiveness of using childcare for outreach to non-Christian immigrants. Any childcare program aimed at non-Christian immigrant families would have to provide a strong example of Christian beliefs in practice and develop an appropriate approach to gradually introduce the Bible and Christian teachings to both parents and children.

The current study contained a spiritual counseling component to the IFSP. Another area for future research and learning is whether the spiritual counseling component offered as a stand-alone program could change the attitudes and perspectives of immigrants towards the AD and promote the adoption of contentment through Christ. Determining the effectiveness of the spiritual counseling would involve offering the program at several congregations with significant immigrant groups. A before-and-after survey could be used to address changes in the attitudes and perspectives of participants with respect to the materialism associated with the AD and their understanding of the benefit of contentment through Christ. The seminar content and materials could be offered to other pastors with the follow-up counseling, Bible study and devotional worship conducted by the pastor with data collected after three months.

APPENDIX A

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR THE BRAZILIAN COMMUNITY

Questions 1 to 16 asked participants to rate their level of agreement with a statement ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. An average score less than 3 indicates disagreement with the statement while a score greater than 3 indicates agreement.

Strongly disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Agree
Disagree		Strongly agree

Q1. I am financially better off in the U.S. than in Brazil.

Q2. In Brazil, all the members of my family had to work to survive.

Q3. In Brazil, my family lived in substandard housing.

Q4. While in Brazil, I believed I could achieve economic prosperity in the U.S.

Q5. Before leaving Brazil, I believed it would not take long to achieve prosperity in the U.S.

Q6. While in Brazil, I believed my children would have more opportunity in the U.S.

Q7. People in Brazil view the U.S. as a place of great wealth and technological development.

Q8. Before leaving Brazil, I believed jobs were plentiful in the U.S.

Q9. My expectations of increased prosperity seem unrealistic.

Q10. My expectations of adjusting to American culture seem unrealistic.

Q11. I am financial better off in the U.S. than in Brazil

Q12. My family has more opportunities in the U.S. than in Brazil.

Q13. I have had difficulty finding employment in the U.S.

Q14. Language barriers have created difficulties obtaining work and education in the U.S.

Q15. The church helps members of the Brazilian community adjust to life in the U.S.

Q16. The reality of life in the U.S. is substantially worse than my expectations before leaving Brazil.

Questions 17 to 26 asked participants to rate their level of agreement with a statement concerning their experience when coming to the U.S. ranging from rarely to all the time. A score less than 2 indicates less frequency while a score above 2 indicates greater frequency.

Rarely or none of the time (1 day) Occasionally (3-4 days)
Some or a little of the time (1-2 days) Most of the time (5-7 days)

Q17. I was bothered by things that don't usually bother me.

Q18. I did not feel like eating: My appetite was poor.

Q19. I felt I could not shake off sadness even with the help of my friends.

Q20. I felt I was just as good as other people.

Q21. I felt depressed.

Q22. I had trouble keeping my mind on what I was doing.

Q23. I felt everything I did was an effort.

Q24. I did not feel hopeful about the future.

Q25. I thought my life had been a failure.

Q26. I felt fearful.

Demographic Questions

What is your sex? Male Female

What is your age?

18-24 25-34 35-44 45-54 55-64 65+

Are you Brazilian? Yes

How many years ago did you immigrate to the United States?

Less than 1 year **1-3 years** **4-6 years** **7-10 years** **More than 10 years**

APPENDIX B
QUESTIONNAIRE FOR PASTORS OF BRAZILIAN CONGREGATIONS

Questions 1 to 16 asked participants to rate their level of agreement with a statement ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. An average score less than 3 indicates disagreement with the statement while a score greater than 3 indicates agreement.

Strongly disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Agree
Disagree		Strongly agree

Q1. Members of my congregation share the belief that anyone can attain their vision of success through hard work regardless of where they were born.

Q2. I have sufficient training and experience to minister to immigrant communities.

Q3. I feel confident giving pastoral care to an immigrant congregation.

Q4. I feel confident giving pastoral care to a multicultural congregation.

Q5. I have a good understanding of the cultural context of Brazilian immigrant communities.

Q6. Brazilian members of my congregation attend services regularly.

Q7. Brazilian members of my congregation seek my spiritual counseling.

Q8. Brazilian members of my congregation seek my counseling to help them adjust to life in the U.S.

Q9. I can help Brazilian members of my congregation by providing practical counseling about improving their education.

Q10. I can help Brazilian members of my congregation by providing practical counseling about obtaining marketable skills

Q11. I can help immigrant members of my congregation remain optimistic about their ability to achieve prosperity.

Q12. I can help immigrant members of my congregation develop and maintain a positive vision for their futures.

Q13. I can help immigrant members of my congregation plan short-term spiritual and secular goals to help them achieve their long-term goals.

Q14. I can provide immigrant members of my congregation with advice to overcome obstacles to achieving their spiritual and secular goals.

Q15. I have sufficient training or education to recognize mental illness in a member of my congregation.

Q16. I have sufficient understanding of depression to recognize symptoms in a member of my congregation.

Q17. I refer members of my congregation with symptoms of mental illness to licensed mental health practitioners.

Q18. I refer members of my congregation with symptoms of mental illness to biblical mental health counselors.

Q19. Brazilian members of my congregation may become depressed because of their standard of living in the U.S.

Q20. Brazilian members of my congregation may become depressed if their expectation for a better life is not achieved.

Q21. I can help Brazilian members of my congregation with depression through spiritual counseling.

Q22. I can help Brazilian members of my congregation with depression by providing practical support to obtain housing.

Q23. I can help Brazilian members of my congregation with depression by providing practical support to obtain employment.

Q24. My spiritual counseling has been effective for improving the situation of Brazilian members of my congregation.

Q25. I feel comfortable offering both spiritual and therapeutic counseling to members of my congregation.

Demographic Questions

How long have you been a pastor? 1-3 years 4-7 years 8-15 years More than 15

How long have you worked with Brazilian immigrants?

8-12 years More than 12 years

APPENDIX C
RESULTS OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE TO THE BRAZILIAN COMMUNITY

Question	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
1	3/5.88%	7/13.73%	4/7.84%	19/39.25%	18/35.29%
2	2/3.92%	3/5.88%	7/13.73%	19/37.25%	20/39.22
3	4/7.84%	15/29.41%	13/25.49%	13/25.49%	6/11.76%
4	2/3.92%	4/7.84%	6/11.76%	17/33.33%	22/43.14%
5	3/5.88%	4/7.84%	7/13.73%	24/47.06%	13/25.49%
6	3/5.88%	0	3/5.88%	16/31.37%	29/58.86
7	0	0	2/3.85%	20/38.46%	30/57.69%
8	0	1/1.96%	1/1.96%	27/52.94%	22/43.14%
9	3/5.77%	18/34.62%	7/13.46%	14/26.92%	10/19.23%
10	8/15.38%	16/30.77%	11/21.15%	11/21.15%	6/11.54%
11	1/1.92%	3/5.77%	4/7.69%	16/30.77%	28/53.85%
12	0	1/1.92%	4/7.69%	14/29.92%	33/63.46%
13	15/28.85%	22/42.31%	7/13.46%	7/13.46%	1/1.92%
14	6/11.54%	9/17.31%	11/21.15%	11/21.15%	15/28.85%
15	0	2/3.85%	7/13.46%	17/32.69%	26/50%
16	10/19.23%	21/40.38%	7/13.46%	7/13.46%	7/13.46%

Question	Rarely or none of the time (1 day)	Some or a little of the time (1-2 days)	Occasionally (3-4 days)	Most or all the time (5-7 days)
17	20/38.46%	14/26.92%	13/35%	5/9.62%
18	40/76.92%	7/13.46%	5/9.62%	0
19	31/59.62%	9/17.31%	9/17.31%	3/5.77%
20	15/28.85%	11/21.15%	13/25%	13/25%
21	33/67.35%	10/20.41%	5/10.20%	1/2.04%
22	29/55.77%	13/25%	5/9.62%	5/9.62%
23	15/30%	12/24%	10/20%	13/26%
24	36/69.23%	7/13.46%	5/9.62%	4/7.69%
25	36/69.23%	10/19.23%	3/5.77%	3/5.77%
26	28/53.85%	17/32.69%	3/5.77%	4/7.69%
Gender	Female 24/46.15%	Male 53.85%		
Ages 18-24 1/1.96%	25-34 8/15.69%	35-44 23/45.10%	45-54 12/23.53%	55-64 6/11.76%

				65+ 1/1.96%
Brazilian	Yes 52/100%			
Q.35 Less than a year 11/21.15%	1-3 years 3/5.77%	4-6 years 5/9.62%	7-10 years 2/3.85%	More than 10 31/59.62%

APPENDIX D

RESULTS OF QUESTIONNAIRE FOR PASTORS OF BRAZILIAN CONGREGATIONS

Question	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
1	0	0	0	4/57.14%	3/42.86%
2	0	1/16.67%	3/50%	1/16.67%	1/16.67%
3	0	0	1/14.29%	5/71.43%	1/14.29%
4	0	1/14.29%	1/14.29%	5/71.43%	0
5	0	0	0	6/85.71%	1/14.29%
6	0	0	3/42.86%	3/42.86%	1/14.29%
7	0	0	2/28.57%	5/71.43%	0
8	0	1/14.29%	0	6/85.71%	0
9	0	0	1/16.67%	5/83.33%	0
10	0	0	4/57.14%	3/42.86%	0
11	0	0	1/14.29%	6/85.71%	0
12	0	0	1/14.29%	6/85.71%	0
13	0	0	3/42.86%	4/57.14%	0
14	0	0	1/14.29%	5/71.43%	1/14.29%
15	0	1/14.29%	2/28.57%	4/57.14%	0
16	0	1/14.29%	2/28.57%	4/57.14%	0
17	0	1/14.29%	1/14.29%	5/57.14%	1/14.29%
18	0	2/28.57%	2/28.57%	3/42.86%	0
19	0	1/14.29%	3/42.86%	2/28.57%	1/14.29%
20	0	0	2/28.57%	4/57.14%	1/14.29%
21	0	1/14.29%	0	6/85.71%	0
22	0	1/14.29%	3/42.86%	3/42.86%	0
23	0	0	03/42.86%	4/57.14%	0
24	0	0	3/42.86%	4/57.14%	0
25	0	1/14.29%	0	5/71.43%	1/14.29%

Question				
29	1-3 years 1/16.67%	4-7 years 1/16.67%	8-15 years 1/16.67%	Over 15 years 3/50%
30	1-3 years 0	4-7 years 0	8-12 years 1/16.67%	More than 12 yr 5/83.33%

APPENDIX E

POTENTIAL GRANT SOURCES

1. American Family Insurance Dreams Foundation. Priority to programs advancing educational equity including childcare and preschools. Grants between \$5,000 and \$10,000.
2. Commonwealth of Massachusetts Commonwealth Cares for Children (C3)/Childcare Stabilization Grants. Provides ongoing funding to meet operational costs for childcare and preschool programs in Massachusetts.
3. Kellogg Foundation Early Childhood Education Grants. Provides funding for early childhood education programs. No specified maximum amount.
4. Mona Foundation. Grants for education to alleviate poverty. Maximum grant not specified.
5. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Childcare Start Up and Expansion Grant. Maximum grant of \$10,000 for a childcare center.
6. Walmart Foundation Local Community Grants. Nonprofit organizations providing benefit to community in which Walmart has a facility. Maximum grant of \$5,000.

APPENDIX F

PROPOSED SEMINAR SCHEDULE AND CONTENT

Session 1 (90 minutes)

5 minutes	Opening prayer
15 minutes	Overview of the purpose of the seminar. Presentation of the concept of the American Dream; origin, different meanings attached to the concept and how it affects people's lives.
5 minutes	Seminar participants write down their understanding of the American Dream and their reasons for coming to the United States. They should include the accomplishments they hope to achieve.
20 minutes	Depending on the number of participants, break into groups of five to discuss their understanding of the American Dream and their reasons for coming to the United States.
10 minutes	Break
35 minutes	Open forum discussion based on following questions: 1. How does the American dream increase the risk of personal failure? 2. What is the assumed personal outcome of achieving your concept of American Dream? 3. What are some of the difficulties you face in achieving the American Dream? 4. If some people believe the American Dream is not possible to achieve, why do they keep trying? 6. How does your effort to achieve the American Dream affect your relationship with God?
2 minutes	Ask participants to think about how the American Dream fits with their understanding of the Bible and the type of lives Christians should lead prior to the next seminar session.
5 minutes	Concluding prayer

Session 2 (90 Minutes)

5 minutes	Opening prayer
15 minutes	Overview of the purpose of the second session of the seminar. Presentation of the biblical passages discussing contentment through Christ and some of the background of the meaning of the concept.
15 minutes	Break into groups of five to discuss the meaning of Philippians 4:11-12, 1 Timothy 6:6-10, and 2 Corinthians 12:9-10.
10 minutes	Presentation of incompatibility of the American Dream with contentment through Christ with reference to the admonition against materialism in Hebrews 12:5 and trusting in God found in Psalm 37:3-4.
10 minutes	Break
20 minutes	Break into groups of five to discuss how everyone in the group can take steps towards finding contentment in Christ in the modern environment experienced by immigrants. Participants will be encouraged to speak freely about their concerns and difficulties with placing their complete trust in God.
10 minutes	Open forum discussion inviting the participants to share ideas about how prayer and Bible study can help Christians remain focused on contentment through Christ.
5 minutes	Concluding prayer and invitation to discuss issues related to contentment through Christ and the American Dream privately with the pastor.
	Dissemination and collection of evaluation form for the seminar.

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